

# The Media and the Academic Globalization Debate

Theoretical Analysis and Critique

Marko Ampuja

## Academic dissertation

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# Abstract

This study offers a reconstruction and critical evaluation of globalization theory, a perspective that has been central for sociology and cultural studies in recent decades, from the viewpoint of media and communications. As the study shows, sociological and cultural globalization theorists rely heavily on arguments concerning media and communications, especially the so-called new information and communication technologies, in the construction of their frameworks. Together with deepening the understanding of globalization theory, the study gives new critical knowledge of the problematic consequences that follow from such strong investment in media and communications in contemporary theory.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part presents the research problem, the approach and the theoretical contexts of the study. Followed by the introduction in Chapter 1, I identify the core elements of globalization theory in Chapter 2. At the heart of globalization theory is the claim that recent decades have witnessed massive changes in the spatio-temporal constitution of society, caused by new media and communications in particular, and that these changes necessitate the rethinking of the foundations of social theory as a whole. Chapter 3 introduces three paradigms of media research – the political economy of media, cultural studies and medium theory – the discussion of which will make it easier to understand the key issues and controversies that emerge in academic globalization theorists' treatment of media and communications.

The next two parts offer a close reading of four theorists whose works I use as entry points into academic debates on globalization. I argue that we can make sense of mainstream positions on globalization by dividing them into two paradigms: on the one hand, media-technological explanations of globalization and, on the other, cultural globalization theory. As examples of the former, I discuss the works of Manuel Castells (Chapter 4) and Scott Lash (Chapter 5). I maintain that their analyses of globalization processes are overtly media-centric and result in an unhistorical and uncritical understanding of social power in an era of capitalist globalization. A related evaluation of the second paradigm (cultural globalization theory), as exemplified by Arjun Appadurai and John Tomlinson, is presented in Chapter 6. I argue that due to their rejection of the importance of nation states and the notion of "cultural imperialism" for cultural analysis, and their replacement with a framework of media-generated deterritorializations and flows, these theorists underplay the importance of the neoliberalization of cultures throughout the world.

The fourth part (Chapter 7) presents a central research finding of this study, namely that the media-centrism of globalization theory can be understood in the context of the emergence of neoliberalism. I find it problematic that at the same time when capitalist dynamics have been strengthened in social and cultural life, advocates of globalization theory have directed attention to media-technological changes and their sweeping socio-cultural consequences, instead of analyzing the powerful material forces that shape the society and the culture. I further argue that this shift serves not only analytical but also utopian functions, that is, the longing for a better world in times when such longing is otherwise considered impracticable.

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# **PART I    BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS**





# 1 INTRODUCTION

As the twentieth century was drawing to a close, the academic imagination became increasingly interested in notions of extreme velocities, multidirectional mobilities and the dissolution of previous social and cultural forms. This millennial mood of revolutionary change was expressed with a terminology that has since become firmly established as another edition of “new rules of sociological method” (Giddens 1976; Urry 2004, 190). This conceptual apparatus includes such catchwords as flows, networks, hybrids, diasporas, cosmopolitanism, connectivity, speed, time-space compression, uncertainty and contingency. The seemingly boundless interchangeability of these concepts should not blind us to the realization that, despite their “de-centredness”, they all gravitate around a core. This core is constituted by the notion that the analysis of society, politics, economy and culture must start from the viewpoint of a new global order, or of a process that is leading to one, namely, globalization. It is not a viewpoint that presumes the coming of a unified order, but rather, one that emphasizes increasing global interconnections and the resultant changes at all levels of human, and possibly even non-human, activity.

Clearly, in identifying such a conceptual field, we are dealing with claims that major social and cultural transformations are taking place. However, one might ask if those concepts and that which they suggest are not in fact rather similar to earlier descriptions of the experience of modern society and modernization. Indeed, there are many parallels between contemporary globalization discourse and the claims of many Western intellectuals in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. They, too, were baffled by the rise of new kinds of global interconnections and flows, which fostered an experience of a social reality that was similarly confusing, speeded-up and “encircled by strange multiplicities” (Pemberton 2000, 12). One particularly strong image that has been etched in sociological discussions of modernity is Marx and Engels’s (1998 [1848], 51, 54) claim concerning “modern bourgeois society” where “everlasting uncertainty” prevails, “all fixed, fast frozen relations [...] are swept away” and “all that is solid melts in the air”. For Marx and Engels, the institutional core that caused the “reckless momentum” of that general melting process (Berman 1991, 91) was clearly visible: it was capitalism with its dynamics and laws of motion that revolutionized production, social relations, commerce and communication – together with enlarging their scope – and brought with it an extended spatial awareness, reaching far beyond local and national contexts.

Today, social theorists are similarly interested in world-shaking developments but in general they claim that earlier models of social change, including the classical sociological tradition as a whole, no longer provide the means by which we can understand these developments. In particular, they have produced epochal diagnoses that posit the demise of what is called “simple modernity” (Beck 1997a, 13) and the coming of a very different social form, so different that we must now even consider whether the notion of “society” has become obsolete (see Outhwaite 2006). Theories of globalization are at the heart of this intellectual movement. This is so despite the fact

that the term globalization itself is much contested and also vulnerable to criticism. One of the main weaknesses of the concept of globalization consists in the fact that it has been used in such a wall-to-wall manner that it now carries a distinctive air of flatness. Yet the reason why it has gained such a commanding position in social and cultural sciences is due to the fact that it is not only used to *describe* social and cultural changes, but that it has also been developed into a *theory* or *explanation* of their causes and consequences (Rosenberg 2000, 3; see Chapter 2, pages 34–39).

Media have a constitutive role in academic globalization theorizations. The impact of new information and communication technologies, in particular, has been argued to necessitate the re-thinking of the fundamentals of social and cultural theory, ultimately reducible to the question of what forces are essential or even overriding for an explanation of social and cultural change. We will be concerned critically to assess this argument in the academic globalization discussions that follow, albeit in different variations and guises.

The general focus of this study is that which I define as academic globalization theory, or as mainstream academic globalization theory. With these concepts, I refer to certain claims, concerns, concepts and understandings – as witnessed by the terminology that was listed above – which have arisen in the past two decades in social theory. The preoccupation with flows, networks, hybrids, (etc.) has coalesced around the problematic of globalization. These concepts have become dominant in the field, to the point of establishing a new theoretical orthodoxy (see Rustin 2003, 8; Curran 2002, 171ff). While the topic of globalization cannot be singled out as the only concern of contemporary social theorists, it is certainly a huge topic, probably even the most popular topic since the 1990s; as some commentators have defined it, a “near obsession” (Ritzer and Goodmann 2003, 569). Globalization is widely presented as the main dynamic of social, cultural, economic and political change. Globalization theory has become an analytically distinctive area or discourse, developed by key contemporary sociologists and cultural theorists. The intellectual contributions which have emerged out of academic globalization discussions have influenced other areas of theory and research. With this in mind, I believe that it is justifiable to argue that, in identifying globalization as my theme, I am thereby in a position to discuss essential recent developments in social theory at large.

This study goes beyond a broad commentary on globalization theory from a generalist perspective. A more specific focal point of this study is the analysis of the relationships between academic globalization theory and the topic of media and communications. In other words, I will deal with the ways in which the relationships between media, communications and globalization have been understood and conceptualized by a number of contemporary social and cultural theorists. Such a focus is not arbitrary. None of the theorists that I will cover in this study are media theorists or media researchers exclusively; all of them, however, are interested in media and communications and comment on them extensively. The arguments made by academic globalization theorists have now also entered into the field of media theory and research in a strict sense. I thus could have explored the issue by concentrating solely on the latter field. However, this would have constituted a somewhat indirect approach, because it

is my intention to examine, as part of my analysis of academic globalization theory, the extent to which social theory in general has been “mediatized”, i.e. expressive of a heightened interest in media and communications as theoretical subjects. As I will show, this extent is not insignificant. The trend in question is also foundational for academic globalization theorists: they support their explanatory frameworks and the claim that major social and cultural changes are under way by *relying heavily on arguments concerning media and communications*. This theme is thus one without which the centre of academic globalization theory would not hold.

The importance of media and communications, in the sense sketched out above, for academic globalization theory, has in my opinion not yet been adequately understood. However, this is not the only motivation for the present study. Besides examining the organic connections between mainstream academic globalization theory and media-based arguments, I want to “map” that theory in order to bring forward the borderlines that separate the different perspectives therein. The sheer magnitude and the confusing multiplicity of different arguments that constitute academic globalization theory are almost overwhelming. Upon closer scrutiny, however, they reveal recurrent themes, patterns and ways of reasoning. The examination of the theme of media and communications has helped me to distinguish between two orientations inside mainstream academic globalization theory: namely, media-technological, on the one hand, and cultural globalization paradigms, on the other (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). These two major paradigms have mutual tensions, but they also possess “elective affinities”, that is, they influence and reinforce each other actively.<sup>1</sup> The central purpose of making such distinctions and observations is in order to clarify the main themes of contention in academic globalization theory, and with this, hopefully, clear the way for further intellectual debate. As I will note in the next Chapter, academic globalization discussions are shot through with all kinds of ambiguities which often cause confusion. My presupposition is that by approaching the topic of globalization from the viewpoint of media and communications, we can analyze and make sense of it in a way that reduces those confusions, and also some unnecessary mystifications. This has become possible today, as academic theorizations of globalization have already matured and been established to the point of forming a distinguishable whole.

While the examination of the relationships between different globalization theory paradigms is crucial for this study, I want to avoid merely registering different trains of thought (and their affinities). It is my intention to bring forward a perspective from which it is possible not only to identify different authoritative accounts of globalization, but also, crucially, to criticize them. This is my primary goal. Focusing on arguments concerning media and communications within the wider context of academic globalization theory cannot alone provide such a basis. Instead, we need to observe how different globalization theorists conceive the relationship between global technological developments, on the one hand, and world-wide cultural flows, on the other, vis-à-vis

<sup>1</sup> I use the concept of paradigm here not in association with a Kuhnian understanding of “normal science” and grand “paradigmatic shifts”, but in the weaker sense that associates it with the co-existence of multiple paradigms within social and cultural sciences. From this perspective, “paradigm” refers to fundamental theoretical and normative differences – including differences in focus, theoretical presuppositions or political goals, etc. – between various approaches or perspectives within social and cultural sciences (e.g., the differences between cultural studies and critical theory).

the structures and logics that guide contemporary global capitalism. I emphasize the last expression here since all of the globalization theorists whose work I will later explore are positioned polemically against critical structural explanations of global capitalism. This act of “distancing” is an elementary part of the ethos of mainstream academic globalization theory. The critical objective of this study is to examine the consequences of this polemical position, especially in terms of how it affects the analysis of media and communications.

There are specific reasons that warrant such a critical approach. I will introduce them in later Chapters more fully, but the chief one among them needs to be introduced already here, as it forms the basic motivation for my enquiry. It is the observation that accounts of media and communications – as they are presented in mainstream academic globalization theory – do not reflect adequately the intensification of capitalism that has been underway in the past two to three decades on a global level.

This omission is not limited to globalization theory. On the contrary, it has been noticeable across the board in social and cultural sciences. There was and is a certain kind of paradox in the intellectual situation that emerged from the post-1989 historical conjuncture marked by the rise of neoliberalism, market dominance and capitalist triumphalism. These developmental trends should have provided a wealth of material for empirical and theoretical investigations on the financialization of the global economy (and the crises that this has produced), the material inequalities resulting from the revitalization of right-wing policies, the pressures directed against the principle of “common good” in the organization of healthcare, energy or culture, the consequences of increasing competition at the workplace for the human psyche, and so on. Of course, such issues have been covered by researchers and theorists who have the appropriate means to address them. However, curiously, as these social trends were gaining strength, many social and cultural theorists and researchers were directing their attention elsewhere. For example, in a book that expresses discontent with the buoyant advancement of postmodernist cultural studies in academia, Nicholas Garnham (1997, 62) notes that while emphasizing the “liberating potential of popular culture”, “a new left politics springing from the ashes of the working-class movement” and “multi-culturalism and the diasporic culture of postcolonialism”, practitioners of this new breed of cultural studies were “increasingly unable to understand and respond to the ways in which the economy is now being restructured on a global scale and the accompanying changes in the spheres of culture and politics”. Similarly, in the same book, Ferguson and Golding (1997, x) remarked that “aspiring graduate students emerging from cultural studies programmes” on “both sides of the Atlantic” were “able to offer the most elegant and detailed discourses on Derrida or Lacanian theory, yet seemingly unaware of current threats to public-service broadcasting or legislative and industrial trends eroding media plurality and democratic diversity”.

These kinds of criticisms may be somewhat exaggerated but they are nonetheless justified. They identify a wide theoretical and political disinterest in powerful material forces that shape the society. This stance is underpinned by the rise of what Rehmann (2007) calls “postmodernist neo-Nietzscheanism” in Western academia in the 1970s and 1980s. Postmodern theory became highly influential in the humanities and

in cultural studies, and it has generated analyses of power that are focused “almost entirely on texts, detached from the material ideological settings and practices in which they are embedded” (ibid., 12-13). Even if the influence of postmodernism is arguably no longer as strong as before, academic globalization theory shows, as we will see, similar signs of de-materialization of social relations and an unwillingness “to decipher the contradictions and antagonisms in these social relations” (ibid., 14). Besides this, there are other questionable points in academic globalization theory, such as its historical myopia and its excessive preoccupation with new media and communication technologies, but they, too, are closely related to the shift away from material relations of power. This shift is interesting but, alas, dubious in light of the rise of neoliberalism, which overlaps with the emergence of globalization theory, as I will argue in Chapter 7.

On the basis of the above-mentioned concerns, this study will address a number of issues around the theme of globalization. I will offer an outline of academic globalization theory and the work of different globalization theorists. I will seek answers to the question of what kind of arguments about media and communications are presented and predominant in that field. How are these media-based arguments founded and how important they are for globalization theory at large? What kind of theoretical perspectives do they reflect and help to constitute? Have they advanced our understanding of society and culture? What kind of critique can we make against ways in which media and communications are treated in academic globalization theory? Through the examination of these questions, this study will both elucidate and increase our understanding of the eminent field of globalization theory and also attempt to make a critical intervention into that realm at the same time. This study is, then, *a critical theoretical analysis of academic globalization theory from the viewpoint of media and communications*.

## 1.1 Approaching Globalization Theory

Given the huge scope and fashionability of academic globalization theory, what is the best way to approach this grand theme? There is no immediate method by means of which we could seize the totality of globalization theory, since it is actually a wide constellation made up of different themes and concerns. One possible solution would have been to arrange the main topic of globalization into a number of substantive subtopics, such as: the logic of flows, spatialization, the fate of the nation state, cultural hybridization, cosmopolitan democracy, and so forth. Each of these could be covered in succession from a theoretical angle. However, this approach does not appear attractive to me in light of the purposes of this study. What I want to avoid is an impressionistic approach to globalization theory, which would end up covering a lot of topics, some of them overlapping with each other considerably, but without the possibility to dig deeper into those themes – which are, in the end, introduced and developed by various individual thinkers. Instead, I want to get closer to the problematics that are important for mainstream academic globalization theory. This is best done, in my view, by way

of exploring systematically the work of relevant individual theorists.<sup>2</sup> This, I think, will also serve to protect against the creation of “straw men” in analyzing the claims of theorists, a practice that is widespread in facile text-book accounts or in overtly polemical treatises.

This choice is based on practical and analytical reasons. All analyses that deal with wide areas of academic interest are drawn into “a vast semantic delta through which shallow and muddy channels meander without apparent purpose” (Rosen 1996, 2). The concept and theory of globalization has created precisely such a delta. My intention – like that of Rosen (ibid.) who writes of the at least equally tricky subject of ideology theory – is “to guide the reader through it by locating what I take to be the main channel” or channels. The whole point in selecting certain authors and their works as exponents of larger debates is, to borrow a phrase from Tomlinson (1991, 11), a “*practical* one of limiting and *containing* [a] massive and ultimately *unknowable* realm of discourse – for how can we know everything that has been said or written on a subject? – within manageable bounds”.<sup>3</sup>

The selection of certain theorists – rather than focusing, first and foremost, on a host of themes – has further advantages. It makes it possible to say something substantial about those individual theorists, while at the same time allowing me to examine the larger theoretical field to which they belong. I have chosen to concentrate on four theorists whose works are crucial for academic globalization debates: Manuel Castells, Scott Lash, Arjun Appadurai and John Tomlinson. They have been selected on the basis of two main criteria.

The first criterion is influence, or at least visibility. The contributions of all of these theorists are well-known and recognized by the international scientific community. Their books and articles have been widely translated and frequently cited in different contexts, including globalization research and theory. Of the four selected authors, Castells is perhaps the most influential one: he became a stellar author in contemporary social sciences with his *Information Age* trilogy, a work which has drawn comparisons to Marx and Weber. Appadurai is a highly respected name in cultural anthropology and cultural studies. He is noted especially for his article concerning “five scapes” of global cultural flows, published in one of the earliest collections of globalization research (Featherstone 1990); it remains a standard reference for researchers who attempt to make sense of the cultural logic of globalization. While arguably not as influential, Lash’s more philosophically oriented works have often been cited and discussed within sociology and cultural studies, as is the case with the work of Tomlinson.

The second criterion is the exemplary status of these theorists in light of the analytical purposes of this study. Their contributions address core elements of mainstream academic globalization theory and highlight its reliance on the analysis of media and communications. They consider the role of electronic media, in particular,

2 For a similar type of approach to other key themes of social theory, see Best and Kellner 1991 (on postmodern theory); Webster 2002 (on theories of information society); and Callinicos 1999 (on social theory in general). Rosenberg’s (2000) critical study of mainstream academic globalization theory, which has affected my own, although he does not focus on media in a specific sense, is also a representative of such approach.

3 Throughout this study, I use italics in citations to refer to emphases in the original texts, unless indicated otherwise.

as elementary for the dynamics of globalization, a feature which is by no means limited to the work of these four theorists, although it comes forward very explicitly therein.

As is the case with “postmodern theory”, the lines that separate “globalization theory” from other substantive areas in sociology or cultural studies are anything but clear. For example, it would be relatively unhelpful to ask academic intellectuals directly to specify to which theoretical camp they belong, as they typically claim originality and are inclined to modify their interests with time. There are also no unequivocal tests that would prove that this or that work is or is not an example of academic globalization theory. Instead, such identification requires close reading. While many of the authors whose work I will discuss in the following Chapters have developed explicit definitions of globalization and use the word incessantly, it is certainly not the case that we can approach the academic debate on globalization by assuming that all relevant research and theorization on the topic are to be found in books and articles that use the word “globalization” extensively (although, of course, this will increase the likelihood). What I define as globalization theory is a body of work that is connected to the constellation of concepts and interests that I evoked at the beginning of this Chapter. The basic idea of globalization is simple enough; on an anodyne level it refers to intensified worldwide interconnectedness. But it has also spawned a much more ambitious perspective, which emphasizes the need to analyze current social, economic, political and cultural changes, and sometimes even known human history, from the viewpoint of a new spatio-temporal logic (of flows, networks, interconnectivity, hybrids, etc.) (see Rosenberg 2000). This observation, with the help of which the locus of academic globalization theory can be identified, will be elaborated further in the next Chapter.

As anyone who is familiar with such globalization literature knows, the list of potential candidates who could have been picked instead of the mentioned ones is much longer. A detailed concentration on the work of more than four theorists would have been possible from a theoretical viewpoint, but this would also have been too much for one study, for obvious economic reasons. Thus I do not claim that I will be able to tackle all of the issues, concepts and different theoretical developments that have left their mark on globalization theory. Advocates of it have generated a large enterprise that continues to expand in different fields of academic research (sociology, social theory, political science, cultural studies, critical anthropology, globalization studies, media research, and so on, all of them borrowing from each other in more or less self-referential ways). Charting this boundary-crossing territory with an all-inclusive eye would represent an immense task, the utility of which, however, is open to dispute. While the list of authors who represent academic globalization theory and its different dimensions is indeed long, there is no need to go through arguments which, in many cases, differ from each other mostly in the manner of presentation but are similar in their substance. There is much overlap in the various concepts used by different globalization theorists. I think that a dissection of minute nuances in these concepts, as they come up in the work of different scholars, would lead the present study astray, away from the examination of more important theoretical matters. All of my selected theorists have their own idiosyncracies and problematics, but they are also putting forward remarkably similar ideas. I use the work of Castells, Lash, Tomlinson and Appadurai as an *entry-point* into



academic globalization theory, a field which at first seems like an impenetrable thicket of all kinds of argumentative paths but which, on a closer look, actually shows more recurrent patterns. My hypothesis is that these selections will enable me to address substantial analytical issues within mainstream academic globalization theory.

Besides the reasons stated above, another reason why I have concentrated on Castells, Lash, Appadurai and Tomlinson is that they complement each other in ways which are useful for my analysis. There is no cultural globalization theorist so self-contained that his or her work would have offered a sufficient baseline by itself. The discussion of Appadurai's and Tomlinson's work provides points of comparison that bring forward key elements in cultural globalization theory. Tomlinson is more extensive than Appadurai with his critique of cultural imperialism, while Appadurai is of seminal importance in establishing the view according to which global cultural flows are increasingly complex (or "disjunctive") and deterritorialized in their logic, fostering imaginations that are crucial for the cosmopolitan, or in Appadurai's case, "post-national" vision. Both of these elements are characteristic for those who have examined globalization from a cultural viewpoint. For similar reasons, I will offer a comparison of Castells's and Lash's views which exemplify the different facets of the perspective that I have identified as media-technological globalization paradigm. The distinction between these two paradigms and the selection of the mentioned four authors as their representatives is based on my extensive reading of academic globalization theory.

I freely admit that this reading is exclusive in the sense that it is limited mainly to books and articles published in English by British or American publishing houses and journals. While this limitation reveals certain determinants in the kind of academic discourse that I am reproducing – determinants which can be acknowledged but from whose influence there is "no simple way out" (see Tomlinson 1991, 12) – it does not pose a threat to my overall goals. After all, what I am addressing in this study are thinkers who can be considered as mainstream globalization theorists. Castells, Lash, Appadurai and Tomlinson are in that position precisely because of the existence of those determinants, i.e. the fact that their no doubt original and acute ideas have been disseminated in the privileged language of English, usually by economically powerful publishing houses of the West. It is because of this that they are in the mainstream, enjoying wide academic circulation internationally.

Castells, Lash, Appadurai and Tomlinson are thus the central characters of this study. Along with them, I will make references to many other theorists during the course of my exploration. I will do this in order to complement the map of academic globalization theory that I am about to offer, in order to illuminate points that come up in the process and so as to show the widespread adoption of certain key theoretical ideas within the discursive field of globalization.

Exploring the theme of globalization, media and communications, this book is divided into four parts. The first Part introduces theoretical backgrounds and contexts. In Chapter 2, I will describe the rise of academic globalization theory and its central features. This Chapter will serve as a basis for my further critique, as it also deals with important challenges to mainstream academic globalization theory perspectives. Chapter 3 will shift the focus to developments in media theory. The examination of



different theories of media and their underlying motives helps us to comprehend the main issues and controversies that emerge in academic globalization theorists' treatment of media and communications. Instead of a comprehensive account, I will deal with those media theory perspectives that are most organically connected to academic globalization debates.

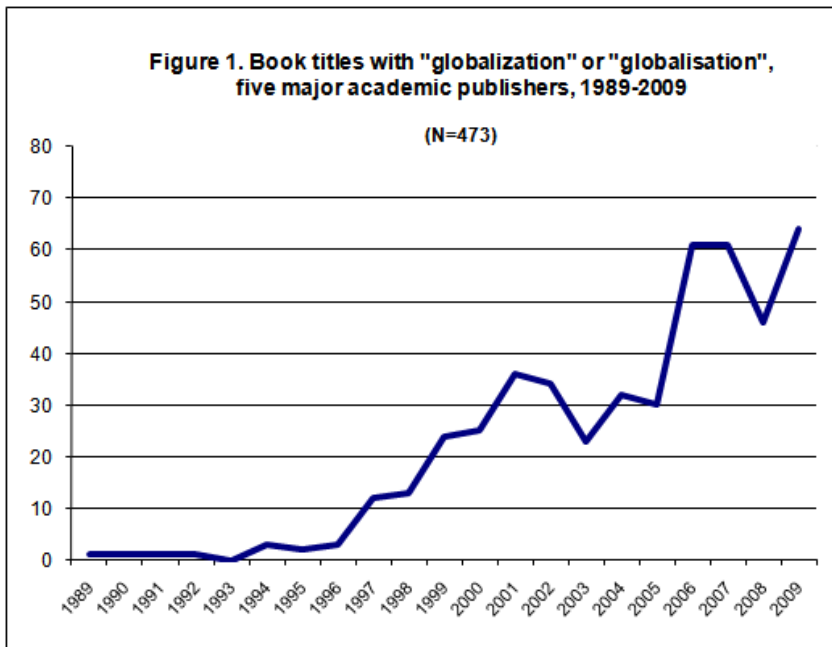
In the next two Parts, I will conduct a critical analysis of key works by the four nominated globalization theorists. First, in Part II, I will target media-technological perspectives on globalization, as exemplified by Manuel Castells and Scott Lash. Both Castells (Chapter 4) and Lash (Chapter 5) have developed conceptualizations and theorizations of a new global informational order. According to them, it is an order which is governed, in its every dimension (economic, political, social and cultural), by the logic of new media and communication technologies. While Castells's position is more ambiguous than Lash's, the ways in which both of them emphasize this pervasive media-driven logic are deeply problematic. Part III (Chapter 6) continues such critical unpacking in the context of a second variant of academic globalization theory: namely, cultural globalization theory. Its exponents, Arjun Appadurai and John Tomlinson, share the same high interest in globalization and media and communication technologies, but they assess their interrelationships from a different, culturally informed perspective. This perspective can be understood through its three main concerns: a rejection of earlier theories of "cultural imperialism"; the claim that the cultural logic of globalization is undermining nationally homogenous identities and generating new "hybrid" cultures; and the concurrent vision of cosmopolitanism (or post-nationalism). Again, I will examine the high presence of media-based arguments in the discussion of such themes and assess them.

This study aims to develop, via the exploration of the theme of media and communications, a deeper understanding of academic globalization theory, including its shortcomings. The last Part of the study (Chapter 7) sums up and develops further the critiques that I have presented against the positions of academic globalization theorists in the previous three Chapters. In conclusion, I advance the argument that those positions cannot be understood without taking into account the political context in which academic globalization theory emerged: namely, the rise of neoliberalism as a practical political programme and ideology. From this perspective, I conclude the study by examining the possible political implications of my subject matter, i.e. the interesting question of whether or to what extent neoliberalism has affected the focuses, rhetoric and ways of reasoning that are typical in globalization theory, a theory that represents the conventional wisdom of our age in academia.



## 2. THE RISE OF ACADEMIC GLOBALIZATION THEORY

As an academic topic, globalization is a source of intellectual stimulation and bewilderment in many kinds of ways. To begin with, there is the sheer size of the field. By now the number of books, articles, courses, web-pages, study programs and seminar papers dedicated to globalization is nothing short of staggering. For instance, in the Oxford Libraries Information System (OLIS) database, which contains over 5 million titles (mainly books and periodicals) held by over one hundred libraries associated with Oxford University, there are over 2500 titles with the word “globalization” or “globalisation” in them, published between 1988 and 2008. This leaves even the famed word “postmodern” and its derivatives behind. As a sign of this continuing success story, key international academic publishers have increased their output on the subject markedly from late 1990s onwards, with no end in sight as of yet (figure 1).



Sources: Sage Publications, Polity Press, Routledge, Palgrave MacMillan, Oxford University Press ([www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com), [www.polity.co.uk](http://www.polity.co.uk), [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com), [www.palgrave.com](http://www.palgrave.com), [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com))

Note: The figure refers to main titles and it includes second editions of books. Hardback and paperback versions of the same book are counted as one.

Even without specific empirical evidence, one is easily led to believe that throughout its reign, globalization has received more academic attention than any other topic. Those who have pointed to the popularity of globalization – both in the public and in the academic domain – have described it, for example, as “the ‘big idea’ of our times” (Held 2002a, 305), “the key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium” (Waters 2001, 1) or “a magic incantation, a pass-key meant

to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries” (Bauman 1998, 1). Hyperbolic language, whether used wryly or not, is an organic part of globalization discourse.

The flip side of this phenomenal success is the fact that the word globalization has turned into a cliché that triggers not only enthusiasm but also growing suspicion among scholars. This is reflected in the circumspect style of writers who have examined globalization as a substantive theme. An author of a major introductory work on globalization wondered at the turn of the century whether the shelves reserved for this theme were “already overcrowded” before venturing into his arguments (Scholte 2000, xiii). Globalization has gained such a powerful or even hegemonic role in elucidating the essential dynamic of modern society and culture that it threatens to push other perspectives to the sidelines. In consequence, it has been met with criticism. When one looks back at the formative stages of globalization discussion in academia, one is struck by how early on the notion started to arouse scepticism. In the field of media research, for instance, calls to “move beyond” globalization were made already in the mid-1990s by Sinclair et al. (1996, 22), for whom it appeared to be a “facile framework” that did not take into account the regionalization of media markets and flows. Speaking from inside a different research tradition, Sparks (1998, 109) questioned whether “an ever-increasing interlocking of the world” was even “best theorised as ‘globalisation’”. Boyd-Barrett (1998, 157) paralleled this in more emphatic terms by dubbing globalization as a “flawed conceptual tool” that has led to a hasty relaxing of former critical theories of international media activity.

From a general perspective, it is clear today that globalization has followed a familiar logic of all much-used social scientific concepts. Their very popularity seems to undermine their usefulness, as they are used so frequently and on so many occasions that this leads to accusations concerning lack of analytical value (see Ferguson 1992). For Van Der Bly (2005, 890–891), globalization signals “a triumph of ambiguity”: it is a concept that creates “an accumulation of confusion rather than an accumulation of knowledge” and in this way hinders the advance of empirical studies on the subject. Another related factor is that intellectuals are typically wary of becoming unfashionable, for reasons that are not merely analytical but also have much to do with attempts to gain cultural capital over others; accordingly, they are prone to shift their interests from conceptual areas that are becoming congested. “I’m not really using [the term ‘globalization’] any more”, states a key globalization theorist and sociologist Ulrich Beck in a recent interview (Rantanen 2005d, 248). He goes on to profess his desire to speak about “cosmopolitanization” instead (the substantial theoretical content of which, nonetheless, comes across as rather similar to that which it aims to replace).

In light of this intellectual suspicion, the remarkable feature about globalization discourse in academia has been its resilience. Many writers have referred to globalization as the definitive concept of the 1990s, comparing it to the success of “postmodernism” in the 1980s. But as Leslie Sklair, another key author on the subject, has pointed out, it seems that “arguments about globalization look set to last well into the twenty-first century” (Sklair 2002, 35). Whatever set of confusions the term gives rise to or however rundown it has become in the process, it is still a subject of intense public and academic debate.

This statement finds support from comparisons between the terms globalization and postmodernism. There are similarities between these vogue words, as they have both been used to describe the essential features of a whole epoch and as their conceptual boundaries are anything but clearly drawn. Nevertheless, postmodernism seems much more exclusive, capturing basically a highly controversial philosophical attitude towards epistemology (see Norris 1992) and taking certain cultural features – especially those which exemplify that attitude the most, like the “hyperreality” of television – as its main point of departure. It must be said that via the work of cultural theorist Fredric Jameson (1991) or social geographer David Harvey (1990), for instance, the discourse on postmodernism or postmodernity has found wider applications. However, despite such critical interventions, the discussion – which is still existent but which also informs more recent discourses indirectly – has never quite escaped the association with linguistic idealism, historical amnesia, political relativism and self-consciously eccentric styles of writing. Globalization, by comparison, is notable for its inclusiveness: although discussions surrounding it are far from being uncontroversial, it has captured the imagination of a far wider group of scholars working in far more diverse fields. Jameson (1998, xvi) refers to globalization as “the horizon of all theory” in social and cultural sciences. As a topic, it

“falls outside the established academic disciplines, as a sign of the emergence of a new kind of social phenomenon, fully as much as an index of the origins of those disciplines in nineteenth-century realities that are no longer ours. There is thus something daring and speculative, unprotected, in the approach of scholars and theorists to this unclassifiable topic, which is the intellectual property of no specific field, yet which seems to concern politics and economics in immediate ways, but just as immediately culture and sociology, not to speak of information and the media, or ecology, or consumerism and daily life.” (Ibid., xi)

In addition to this all-embracing academic scope, the fact that globalization carries such an importance in general public debates concerning the fate of democracy and world-wide distribution of resources sets it even more sharply apart from the other term: hardly anyone would be or would have been motivated enough to take to the streets because of the things that *postmodernism* tends to encapsulate, but with *globalization* it is a wholly different matter. The latter term refers, among other things, to a material problematic and social struggle that is not easily solved within the time-period of an academic fad.

This study takes as its point of departure the academic discussions of globalization, which are in many ways related to but also crucially different from globalization debates in public arenas. These linkages and dissimilarities deserve a short treatment in this section, for it is not self-evident what the relationship between the public and the academic assessments of globalization are. To make them visible clears the field for my study.

## 2.1 The Public and the Academic Dimensions of Globalization

When we look at the public debate about globalization, we find that it has concentrated massively on the economic dimensions of globalization in a political-normative or ideological sense.<sup>1</sup> In this register, questions about whether economic globalization is a good or a bad thing, about whether it an incontrovertible fact to which we must merely readjust ourselves and what kind of globalization processes are defensible are of prime importance. Many academic experts have taken part in this conversation, with perspectives ranging from the apologetic to the critical; but the issue has been too important to be left only to the intellectual classes. Globalization is a multi-accentual sign, which represents not only intellectual endeavours but also the nightmares and aspirations of subordinated social groups as well as the powerful interests of privileged minorities.

The latter feature, that is, globalization as the ideology of the dominant sectors of society, has been taken up in various critical studies. Political scientist Manfred B. Steger (2002) notes that, again and again, globalization has been represented in public discussions as the legitimization of global capitalism, “with simplified images of the free-market world far more coherent and desirable than it really is” (ibid., x). He (ibid., 43–80) separates out five central claims of this ideology: 1) that globalization is about liberalization and global integration of markets; 2) that it is inevitable and irreversible; 3) that nobody is in charge of globalization; 4) that it benefits everyone (or at least, that the benefits override any negative features by a wide margin); and 5) that it furthers the spread of democracy in the world. These claims are joined together, not as a monolith, but as a set of loose but firmly held beliefs which are spread throughout various institutions and public organs, and which express the voice of major corporations, financial organizations and governmental bodies.

For Steger (2002, x), these beliefs are manifestations of *globalism*, “the dominant ideology of our times”, a rhetoric more powerful than any other at this particular stage of history. This ideology has a close and necessary link to neoliberal economics and policies, which became dominant in the early 1980s in Western countries and which then spread throughout the world. In a crucial sense, globalism has been used to maintain and to boost the central beliefs of neoliberal orthodoxy (see Chapter 7) by associating them with a distinctive kind of understanding of globalization in the 1990s and beyond. Globalism is the continuation of neoliberalism by a related economic worldview. Whether the engines driving forward this dogma are beginning to run out of fuel is a matter of dispute (see e.g. Saul 2005; Birch and Mykhnenko 2010). Whatever the case may be, this will not happen overnight, even though the global financial crisis that began in 2007–2008 – the worst since the Great Depression – has a good chance to cause “the demise of neoliberalism” (Torbat 2008).

1 See e.g. Lounasmeri's (2006) article on the uses of “globalization” in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the biggest subscription newspaper in Finland. According to her, the concept of globalization has been used in the paper in two ways: either it is discussed as an economic phenomenon whereby it refers to globalized capitalism, neoliberal policies and the challenges of international competition faced by Finland; or it is used in the sense of a cultural or social issue, referring mainly to the idea of how we all live now in a reflexive world society, a conception that comes close to what I have named in this study as mainstream academic globalization theory. The first usage is clearly the dominating one in *Helsingin Sanomat*, against which the second appears as a “counterdiscourse” (ibid.).

The public weight of globalism lies not only in its ubiquitous linguistic forms, for it is also a source of social power that has material consequences in politics, culture and society. The relationship between globalization as an empirical process and its rhetorical representations (globalism) do not exist in isolation from each other. As literary theorist Terry Eagleton (1991, 14–15) reminds us, all ideologies must, in order for them to be effective, connect in some ways to the material realities of the majority. In this way, they cannot merely be instances of “false consciousness”; rather, they fulfil their role as meanings in the service of power all the better when they connect to the practical experiences and understandings of people, even if these are then distorted in ideological discourse. It is, however, far from being clear how widely globalist assumptions are actually shared by the dominated; in fact, this aspect is probably of lesser public importance than the fact that a decisive section of the elite offers globalism as the reasoning behind its deeds and acts accordingly. For practical political consequences stemming from this, the limited view of globalization that globalists advocate has not gone unchallenged. This has been most visibly expressed by recurrent mass demonstrations and political movements against transnational trade institutions and global business alliances.

As for the academic critique, Beck (2000) has attacked the notion of globalism in a closely related manner. He sees globalism as “a thought-virus” which has infected “all parties, all editorial departments, all institutions” (*ibid.*, 122). It generates a vision according to which “world markets” replace or take over political action, a view that is concomitant with long-standing neoliberal doctrines. The main problem with globalism for Beck is that it is both intellectually and politically deficient: it is one-dimensional propagation of the suppression of everything under economic considerations, while at the same time, it masquerades itself as un-political, disinterested knowledge when its effects are, precisely, revolutionary in political terms and caused by a logic that is being dictated from above. This works against the main ideas of many contemporary sociologists working broadly on the basis of the same assumptions as Beck, who are in search of politics in a new cosmopolitan global society, which should not be confused with the supposed freedoms of a neoliberal global market society.

This short review of the concept of globalism shows that public and academic discussions of globalization are necessarily entangled. Given the political importance of economic dimensions of globalization and the ideological justifications of them, it is only logical that academics are widely interested in issues similar to those that animate the public at large. This confluence has also offered a way to bring politics, academic research and public discussions closer to each other than would be the case with regard to more esoteric academic topics. In addition to political concerns, this also serves analytical ends. According to Steger, one really cannot separate the ideological-normative public debates of globalization from academic discussions, because the former is a constitutive feature of what globalization is all about. To separate them would offer an impoverished picture of the phenomenon. Furthermore, if one were to try to study globalization systematically apart from the crucial public debates concerning it, one would run the risk of being too detached scientifically, and therefore “making it

easier for existing power interests to escape critical scrutiny” (as in the case of dominant ideology of globalism) (Steger 2002, 41).

But here, in the exact form of confluence between academic and public debates about globalization – the discussion concerning its economic dimension and its consequences – lies also their point of divergence. The academic study of globalization, as practiced by contemporary sociologists, social and cultural theorists and researchers in various disciplines, has been characterized especially by attempts to focus on it in a way that is more diversified than in the public area. As such, this feature is of course independent of any specific topic, since the whole meaning behind academic research is the attempt to avoid a narrow, “journalistic” outlook. However, it can be argued that globalization, as a theoretical concept, is especially extensive and complex.

## 2.2 The Complexity of Globalization Theory

Globalization has been studied inside individual academic fields with particular themes and approaches, but there is also a more comprehensive and ambitious type of globalization analysis, whose exponents have aimed at providing a broad theory of how globalization should be conceived. These writers, among them Malcolm Waters (1995), Martin Albrow (1996), David Held (et al.) (1999), Ulrich Beck (2000) and Jan Aart Scholte (2000), have repeatedly made the point that globalization is above all a *multidimensional* process. According to Beck (2000, 59), we can thus speak of communication-technological, ecological, economical, organizational and civic-societal globalizations, among others. These are not to be approached from any one perspective, since “each must be independently decoded and grasped in its interdependences” (ibid., 11). Without at this point making any further observations about the overall character of the academic study of globalization, I want to note that it differs from public conceptions fundamentally in terms of the level of complexity. Whereas the public debate has concentrated on the economic dimension, globalization research in academia seems to know no boundaries. Globalization has become a major topic especially in the social and political sciences and cultural studies; but it has also reoriented work in the humanities and even to a certain extent in the natural sciences. Political scientist Jo-Anne Pemberton (2001, 169) describes this situation well:

“An array of articles and phenomena, many of which bear no close or even discernible relation to one another, have been placed under this rubric. Laden with significance, globalisation has been rendered as a motive power. In some accounts it is as if all the various manifestations of globalisation, such as intercontinental ballistic missiles, international drug cartels, pollution and capital flows, arise from an original impulsion, one which incites them to rupture established political arrangements and conceptual taxonomies.”



Noteworthy here is Pemberton's reference to "original impulsion". Judging from the enormous volume and diversity of issues that characterizes this topic, one gets the impression that globalization has emerged as an enigmatic force, akin to a Bergsonian *élan vital*, which pulsates in social organisms and causes them to develop towards more and more intricate forms, or a drive so potent that it bursts through every obstacle that was erected to hinder its flow.

The origins of this force and the reasons behind its polymorphic existence are equally veiled in a shroud of mystery. In many accounts, globalization is such a towering object that it can apparently only be approached indirectly, with the knowledge that any attempt to give it a precise definition or explanation is doomed to failure. Here, one can even note certain metaphysical overtones in globalization discourse that bear a resemblance to a key tenet of Judeo-Christian belief – namely, that one is prohibited to pronounce the name of God and allowed only to approximate it (so as not to profane the ineffable). To state this comparison is, I think, at the most a slight exaggeration. On more than one occasion, the academic discourse of globalization has been compared to an ancient parable of six blind scholars and their encounter with an elephant: each of the scholars have their own partial and insufficient idea of the creature and therefore none of them can produce an exhaustive and coherent picture of what stands in front of them. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, there is still considerable consensus in academia over the need to study globalization because, in a manner of speaking, "one can still posit the existence of the elephant in the absence of a single persuasive and dominant theory" (Jameson 1998, xi).

As noted, the central difference between public and academic globalization debates is that the latter are characterized by the attempt to give globalization an analytic treatment – at attempt that is, paradoxically, at the same time threatened by the complexity of globalization. Yet many academic champions of this subject have not succumbed to these difficulties, but have instead attempted to tackle them head-on.

Thus for Beck, for instance, the complexities of globalization (both at the analytical and the empirical level) are not at all frustrating. In fact, they signal new kinds of political opportunities. His reasoning goes basically like this: if we accept that globalization is above all a variegated phenomenon, then we can assume that it is not driven by some overriding single logic. Globalization is not a monstrosity that threatens to smother us with its gigantic size. Instead, it consists of many different logics, to which we can orientate in more manageable and in more particular ways. "Only then can the depoliticizing spell of globalism [as a totalistic form of understanding] be broken; only with a multidimensional view of globality can the globalist ideology of 'material compulsion' be broken down" (Beck 2000, 11). In other words, the lesson is that when one looks at globalization from an analytical angle, thus highlighting its multiple forms, one can conclude that its level of determination by any one form (usually found to be that of the economic) is of lesser weight. Globalization is determined by many kinds of social and cultural forces, each of which are not overwhelmingly more powerful than the other; this then gives us more leeway to shape it in ways that we see fit. The tone of much of academic studies of globalization is decidedly optimistic, reflecting Beck's (1993, 33) famous declaration that he is *Pessimismusmüde* ("tired of pessimism").

From a somewhat more politically detached viewpoint, Beck's British colleague Martin Albrow stresses in his award-winning book *The Global Age* (1996, 90) the "indeterminacy and ambiguity in the analytic concept of globalization". And indeed, he goes to great lengths in order to dodge the question of how to define globalization clearly (see *ibid.*, 88 for a highly complex attempt). In Albrow's hands, *globalization* or *globality* become terms that convey, provided that they are relieved from the ballast of unreflexive public and academic usage, the essential difference of our era as against modernity. They offer a way of speaking about radically new things that should not be reduced back to *modern* experience and understandings. Globality is not a continuation but a clear break from modernity along with its intellectual certainties and projections of historical development ("the modern project"). Albrow writes that globalization does not have, as he claims that modernization had, a developmental logic leading toward certain goals; therefore, it does not have a beginning, "no inherent direction or necessary end-point" (*ibid.*, 95). It is not a "process' which explains the social transformation" and we do not even "know when we will reach it or where it is" (*ibid.*, 87, 91).

It is difficult to get more vague than this, even if we speak of social theory. In the end, for Albrow (1996, 85) globalization is simply a name, a "marker for a profound social and cultural transition". He compares it to the Renaissance or Reformation, which refer in a similar manner "to the aggregate of historical changes over a determinate period of history" as metaphors "holding together a disparate range of phenomena" (*ibid.*, 91, 95). These kinds of concepts do not, by themselves, explain anything; what they do is to make us to see connections between countless instances such as (in the case of globalization) increased trade between nations, satellite news delivery, global protest movements, films gaining world-wide box-office returns, pandemics, mass exoduses or other phenomena that exemplify the Global Age. Above all, there is Albrow's conviction that globalization ushers in a combination of forces "which unexpectedly changes the direction of history" (*ibid.*, 101). However, since this transition does not follow any previously defined dynamics or historical "laws" (progress, rationality, systemic goal orientation, a striving for classless society, etc.), we ultimately cannot say much more than that globalization involves "indeterminacy" and "contingency", words that appear frequently in literature that deals with the meaning and effects of globalization. These meanings are equally hard to fathom as it is to define the concept itself.

Globalization is inherently prone to become an aporia or an antinomy, stretching the limits of what is resolvable and what is not conceivable at a conceptual or theoretical level. In contemporary academic discourses, it breaks through previously separated boundaries and fuses together seemingly contradictory opposites, as, for example, in analyses of the interplay between the global and local, a problematic that appears under the notion of "glocalization" (Robertson 1992, 173–174; Beck 2000, 31) or "hybridization" (see Chapter 6). For Albrow, however, all of this, as well as the resulting confusion, is unavoidable and necessary. For the times have changed: "The analytic concept of global can never be as precise as that of capital", Albrow (1996, 90) asserts, gesturing to modern social theory in general and to Marxism in particular. Old certainties have given way to new ambiguities; now, "we are aiming to depict the character of an epoch without deriving it from any single principle, or indeed from any

set of principles” (ibid., 109). Albrow maintains that an attempt to remove theoretical ambiguity from globalization constitutes a form of intellectual violence that results when the immense multiplicity of the present global situation is not taken into account. This situation cannot be approached from the standpoint of earlier “totalizing” social theory, which is plagued by the faults of both of its “positivist and idealist versions” (ibid., 93).

Albrow’s programme is ambitious but also not very comprehensible. What is clear, in a similar manner as in the case of Beck, is that his vision of radical indeterminacy is coated with optimism. Globalization is not about an end-of-epoch pessimism or nostalgic yearning for a paradise lost, but about a birth of something extraordinary, even “an age for all the people” (Albrow 1996, 105). What Albrow is searching for analytically is a social theory that would escape earlier intellectual dead-ends in one devastating blow, by building a new theory for new times.

The problem, however, is that his theory is not able to deliver a conviction that everything has changed beyond recognition, or that we need to discard all that was provided by earlier theoretical perspectives. On a closer look, the newness of the global age seems to be less of a novelty. Thus, for example, Albrow (1996, 135) concedes that “many of the forces of modernity, especially scientific activity and technology, continue to expand”. This is typical for globalization theories in general: the declaration of the new is regularly and quickly followed by a qualification declaring the fixity of the old. Albrow’s own perspective points constantly to the future and towards novelties but without making clear what this new is in a definite sense compared to the old (other than the general growing ambiguity). It must be said that when one reads theoretical literature on globalization, one regularly gets the frustrating feeling of chasing after mirages that are forever receding even when they seem to be right at your fingertips. As the thing to which Albrow points has no clear name or form, one has to believe in the radical newness of globalization on the basis of assertion, rather than due to careful argumentation. When he states, for example, that “Globality restores the boundlessness of culture and promotes the endless renewability and diversification of cultural expression rather than homogenization or hybridization” (ibid., 144), or that “the key change is not reflexive modernization, but globalization, where globality has replaced rationality as the dominant characteristic of the age” (ibid., 136), one is warranted to ask if there really is substance here beyond word-play and an intellectual narcissism of minor differences.

Albrow’s treatment of globalization does contain many typical elements of globalization theories, which I will examine more closely in a short while. It should be noted, however, that it is also one of the most extreme versions of the argument that globalization compels us to renew social theory. Albrow’s prime message is that history is radically open because of globalization and that nothing is to be taken for granted. But here there is also a risk of ending up in a performative contradiction. For if anything can happen, does it really make sense to postulate any bearings for societal development? Shouldn’t we just lie back and let history unfold itself in its unpredictable-contingent ways?

In order to shed light on this question, I will turn to a further and even more emblematic example in demonstrating the ways in which the belief in indeterminacy and radical change abound in globalization debates. There is an emerging interdisciplinary perspective that studies the natural, social and cultural world under the notion of complexity or complexity theory. Given that the exponents of this field are inclined to speak about a new epoch in world history – “the moment of unprecedented complexity, when things are changing faster than our ability to comprehend them” (Taylor 2001, 3) – which is driven by the dynamics of “turbulence”, “disequilibrium”, “nonlinearity” and other concepts borrowed from the lexicon of natural sciences, it was to be expected that this field of intellectual activity would encounter globalization debates.

John Urry argues in his book *Global Complexity* (2003), echoing Albrow’s sentiments, that we should develop a new social theory for the twenty-first century. What we need, according to Urry, is the theory of complexity that has already revolutionized the natural sciences. He offers it as a master paradigm that fuses together the previously separated worlds of natural and social sciences. It is a key component of “sociology beyond societies” (Urry 2000a), one that explodes the dichotomies of society and environment, technology and humans, determinism and chance. How does the idea of complexity relate to globalization? It proposes that globalization is an uncertain and intricate process that is not under the control of human societies. “Global systems can be viewed as interdependent, as self-organizing and as possessing emergent properties. I suggest that we can examine a range of non-linear, mobile and unpredictable ‘global hybrids’ always on the ‘edge of chaos’” (Urry 2003, 14). Examples of these “hybrids” are information systems, global media, money, oceans, health risks, climate change and social protests. For Urry, events like the 9/11 terrorist attacks are indicators of growing complexity: they are chaotic and non-predictable, producing “a spiralling global disequilibrium” (ibid., 92). We cannot anticipate any linear forms of globalization; instead, we have to prepare ourselves for surprising risks, which build up in global networks and seem to appear from nowhere. For the analysis of these phenomena, Urry recommends the concept of complexity. The future trajectory of society is open-ended and indeterminate because it is based on the multiplication of complexity on all levels.

The difficult part is, as Urry acknowledges, the possibility “that current phenomena have outrun the capacity of the social sciences to investigate” them (Urry 2003, 38). What this amounts to is that one is persuaded to analyze globalization from a highly abstract and general framework of complexity. This framework generates a new terminology, which is meant to sum up the essence of how the present situation defies older social orderings, determinations and boundaries. Instead of invariance and order, we witness the rise of “fluidity”, “viscosity”, “constant disorder”, “networks”, “flows”, “mobility” and “chaos”. Much effort is being put into the development of this terminology, and therein lies also the basis for a critical argument: “complexity and emergence are still in the mode of general ideas rather than modelled solutions, and so whilst the trail of suggestive notions [...] is exciting to follow, it is less clear that these leads are readily ‘applicable’ as such” (McLennan 2003, 558).

This reference to complexity theory reveals the same problematic that is integral to globalization discussions in general. The notion of globalization, especially but

not only as it is developed by Albrow and Urry, is always on the edge of becoming so elusive that it ceases to be analytically useful. Globalization refers to innumerable things and processes and their causes and effects are often left unspecified. Here, it should be noted that there are problems with the overall reasoning that characterizes mainstream academic globalization theory. Since contradictory outcomes are possible (e. g. homogenization of culture through capitalist domination vs. growing diversity through growing and more complex intercultural exchanges) in the multidimensional usage of globalization, this may signify the problematic nature of the concept:

“it seems to hold that when globalization refers to quintessential pluralistic processes, statements like ‘globalization will lead to more inequality’ cannot be made. Yet if the different globalizations lead to different destinations, what do the processes have in common? What is the single cause the different processes are referring to and what makes it possible to represent them with one single term?” (Van Der Bly 2005, 886)

Of course, Albrow and Urry would maintain that we have to work with this complexity (because that is how the world is constituted nowadays) and not remain stuck in an obsolete mindset craving for stilted simplicity. Other globalization theorists, however, have a more pragmatic fear of the “imprecision and inconsistency in respect of definitions” that has “produced a lot of confusion and stalemate in knowledge about, and responses to globalization” (Scholte 2000, 41). Scholte goes on to argue that “Definitions fundamentally shape descriptions, explanations, evaluations, prescriptions and actions. If a core definition is slippery, then the knowledge built upon it is likely to be similarly loose and, in turn, the policies constructed on the basis of that knowledge can very well be misguided” (ibid., 42).

The meaning of globalization is notoriously difficult to pin down. In itself, this is not that unusual: many key concepts in social and cultural sciences can be criticized for their indefiniteness, as is the case with concepts such as “culture”, “ideology” or “discourse”. Up to a point, this problem seems to be inevitable, because such concepts refer to such wide areas of human activity. Nevertheless, there still seems to be something that sets globalization apart from many other watchwords. Speaking of public discussions about the topic, a writer in the Finnish daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* notes that “Few nouns are as controversial as this one. To define globalization requires a lot of skill from those who try to do it neutrally, such as editors of dictionaries” (Aittokoski 2005). While public writers can and do use the term without much elaboration, the situation is different in academic circles. There are a number of studies and text-books that try to conceive globalization in a consistent manner in order to reduce the overall ambiguity of the term. This has not arisen from the wish to deny the multidimensionality of the phenomenon, but from the desire to give globalization a rigorous formulation and theoretical status; in a word, to make it more operational. Sociologists from English-speaking countries have been at the forefront of such attempts (Hoogvelt 1997, 121).

## 2.3 Globalization and the “Spatio-Temporal Reformulation of Social Theory”

One of the earliest attempts to give globalization a distinctive formulation was made by the American sociologist Roland Robertson in the 1980s. He defined globalization as a concept that “refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson 1992, 8). The reference to world compression brings to the forefront the historicity of globalization, since the building up of social networks at the global level has been going on for a long time, going back to times before modernity. Examples of this are world trade or, later, international organizations operating in various arenas. Robertson tracks the historical path of world compression on these terms, but also stresses that “the concept of globalization *per se* is most clearly applicable to a particular series of relatively recent developments concerning *the concrete structuration of the world as a whole*” (ibid., 53). The reason for this is that religious, political and economic-organizational developments – secularization, end of the cold war and adoption of similar forms of economic rationality everywhere – have, at an accelerated pace in the last couple of decades, allowed the formation of a global system in ways unseen before. This is most concretely evident, Robertson maintains, in the ways in which people all over the world have developed a “global consciousness”. Whereas previously their thinking was based on the perspective of locality or nation, now the viewpoint is much more likely to be that of humanity or the world (which is present in such phrases as “world order”, “human rights” or “saving the planet”).

The primary effect of globalization is thus felt, according to Robertson, at the general cultural level of experience, in the widening of mental frameworks of action. Something similar is stressed by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, who defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990, 64). He points to the subjective dimensions of this process, especially the ways in which events and personalities from far-away places intrude into the locally-situated and intimate life-worlds of people, facilitating a new kind of global awareness and “action at distance” (Giddens 1994, 96). The world has undergone a “restructuring of space” (ibid.). It has become much more than before a single – although not culturally homogenous – entity, in which humanity faces common threats and risks (e.g. global climate change), “no matter where we live, and regardless of how privileged or deprived we are” (Giddens 2002, 3).

Both Robertson and Giddens are fully aware that the rise of global consciousness and reflexivity is dependent on material processes that make the change in the phenomenal level possible. These processes, however, do not figure in their pioneering definitions of globalization. Therefore, the stage was set for more wide-ranging definitions of globalization. One of them is offered by David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton in their 1999 book, *Global Transformations*, which could very well make the claim (inscribed in its blurb) to be “the definitive work on globalization” – at least insofar as we are discussing currently hegemonic perspectives of globalization.

According to Held (et al.) (1999, 16), globalization is

“a process (or set of processes), which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power”.

A similar kind of stress on the interconnectedness is common to academic definitions of globalization (see also Thompson 1995, 149; Waters 2001, 5). But where these writers break new ground is their division of this interconnectedness into four analytical dimensions (extensity, intensity, velocity and impact), each of which requires attention. Globalization thus implies: 1) the “*stretching* of social, political and economic activities across frontiers”; 2) that “there is a detectable *intensification*, or growing magnitude of interconnectedness, patterns of interaction and flows which transcend the constituent societies”; 3) that these interconnections also imply “a *speeding up* or global interaction and processes” due to “the development of worldwide systems of transport and communication”, which “increases the potential velocity of global diffusion of ideas, goods, information, capital and people”; 4) and finally, that there is a growing “enmeshment or mixing of global and the local such that the *impact* of distant events is magnified while even the most local developments may come to have enormous global consequences” (Held et al. 1999, 15).

The merits of this definition are readily comprehensible. Compared to Robertson’s and Giddens’ earlier propositions, it offers a more varied and a more systematic look at what kind of dimensions there are in the growing global interconnectedness. Nonetheless, it is not advisable to make definitions of globalization into a fetish. In the end, definitions are merely tools for broader analysis, not the final word on a given topic (even though, of course, a sloppy definition will attract criticism, which is one of the reasons why academics wrestle with public proclamations of globalization). The definition given by Held and his associates is a starting-point for their work on various forms of globalization past and present. They discuss the world-wide development of territorial states and interstate politics, organized violence, trade and markets, financial institutions, corporations and production, migration, culture and environment. Their aim is to offer a comparative analysis of historical forms of globalization, which they do in a much more extensive manner than Robertson (1992, 58–60), who discusses the same theme under his “minimal phase model of globalization”, which remains a sketch. Held and his co-writers divide the history of globalization into four periods: premodern, early modern (1500–1850), modern (1850–1945) and contemporary. As a consequence, their project is not only a work on the sociology of globalization; it is also an ambitious piece of civilization history. What they want to achieve is “a historical approach to globalization [which] avoids the current tendency to presume either that globalization is fundamentally new, or that there is nothing novel about the contemporary levels of



global economic and social interconnectedness since they appear to resemble those of prior periods” (Held et al., 17).

This kind of double-vision produces a far-reaching retrospective gaze. Suddenly even premodern empires, nomadic movements across the Eurasian steppes and the Black Death become instances of globalization, however incipient they are. As the history and the particular globalization narrative developed by the mentioned authors moves on, more and more events – military conquests, pandemics, technological inventions, the building up of modern institutions, cultural and trading contacts, missionary activities and energy emissions – are sucked into the accelerating swirl of globalization, until finally today, virtually nothing and certainly no-one escapes its gravitational force.

As Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999, 429ff) approach the end of their influential study, they make it clear that the historical forms of globalization are in the final analysis just preludes to contemporary shake-ups. According to them, there are many examples of fundamental and historically unparalleled features of contemporary globalization, produced by the conjunction of social, political, economic and technological forces. Here are some such novelties: global flows and interactions embrace now all social domains and aspects of social life, not just some; globalization itself is being regulated by unprecedented institutional and organizational arrangements; elite and popular consciousness throughout the world is moulded by media and other communication infrastructures which fuel conflicting visions of world order; growing awareness of globalization leads also to its contestation, and it has become a chronic political issue of great importance.

Held's and his co-writers' account resonates substantially with much current analysis of globalization and with contemporary social theory at large. An elementary observation is that they put forward a description of globalization that strives for an exhaustive scope, both synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, they analyze and define globalization in a way that will, in principle, include all imaginable material and non-material activities or processes, provided that they fulfil certain minimal requirements. In order to meet these requirements, a given phenomenon must simply be demonstrated to be about “interregional flows” or border crossings, which give rise to ever more complex and interconnected political, economic, social and cultural forms. Diachronically, it transpires that globalization, thus understood, has a very broad time frame, stretching far back in human history; in fact it is coterminous with known human history (Held et al. 1999, 414–418). While it has no exact beginning, globalization is certainly not reducible to modernization, even if it has intensified after the Second World War and the end of the Cold War.

The second general observation concerns the theoretical underpinnings of globalization as presented by Held and others. What they postulate is a problematic that is fundamentally different from “traditional” sociology. Globalization is not the same thing as rationalization or the supersession of *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft*. It is about the study and theory of various forms of interconnections and cross-border transactions between different regions of the world. Following Giddens's distinction (1984, xvi–xvii), we can note that much current analysis of globalization has much more to do with general social theory (issues that are “the concern of all social sciences



[...] the nature of human action and the acting self; with how interaction should be conceptualised and its relations to institutions”) than with sociology (“which focuses particularly upon the ‘advanced’ or modern societies”). However, it must also be noted that a typical sociological emphasis on the latest societal developments, particularly pronounced in current theories of “second modernity” (see Chapter 7), is a key feature in globalization analyses. In the end, Held (et al.) are keen to make the contemporary “thick” patterns of globalization stand out so as to justify the fruitfulness of their overall perspective.

What seems clear is that Held et al. have put forward a powerful and detailed perspective that represents and develops further certain basic elements that are constituents of a wider academic consensus on globalization. As previously noted, chief among them is the belief that “globalization should be conceived as a multidimensional concept which cannot be reduced to either the economic or the cultural aspect” (Kosonen 1999, 190). This belief is by now stated as an obvious starting point for many globalization analyses, requiring no further elaboration. The problem with this, however, is that precisely to the extent that it has become such a natural attitude, the theoretical consequences that follow from it are sometimes ignored in a knee-jerk manner. It is legitimate to ask, keeping in mind the different aspects of globalization, if certain force(s) behind growing global interconnections is/are still more crucial than others? This question refers to the problem of causation that is central to globalization debates: what exactly is driving the overall process?

Mainstream globalization theorists are typically very circumspect in answering this question. Held (et al.) (1999, 12) state that their view is in line with significant attempts by others (such as Giddens, Robertson, Scholte and Albrow) “which [highlight] the complex intersection between a multiplicity of driving forces, embracing economic, technological, cultural and political change”. This, again, increases the level of complexity in academic globalization studies, a complexity that is not easy to reduce because of the ways in which globalization arguments are commonly structured. Due to the difficulties involved in the attempt to establish “prime forces” behind globalization, many academic authors avoid the question altogether or note that it is difficult to separate causes from effects in order to concentrate on the latter. This is visible also in formal definitions of globalization; for example Giddens (1990, 64; see above, page 30) or Waters (2001, 5) make no claim as to what drives “the intensification of world-wide social relations” or makes constraints of geography disappear.

Scholte (2000, 89ff), however, is wary of the difficulties to which such a “loose treatment of a key question” may lead. He attempts to conduct “a careful analysis of the forces that generate the trend”. He argues that globalization is caused, mainly, by four factors: 1) the spread of rationalism as a dominant knowledge framework; 2) capitalist development (market expansion combined with decentralized production and consumption); 3) technological innovations (jets, computers, etc.); and 4) changes in international regulatory frameworks such as governance mechanisms. In this way, Scholte gives a more concrete picture of what drives globalization than Held and others, for whom the question remains buried under thick descriptions of contingent historical conjunctures. However, in a manner that resembles their presentation, Scholte (ibid.,

106) maintains that the four causal dynamics he mentions are “thoroughly interrelated” and that none of them have primacy over the others. This assertion, however, is not followed by an analysis of how these dynamics are connected. This would lead to a theoretical discussion of, say, what kind of relationship there exists between technological development and capitalism, or between recent changes in political regulation and neoliberalism. Without this kind of theoretical discussion – which is not attempted primarily in order to avoid the charge of this or that form of determinism or political radicalness (see *ibid.*, 108) – even the kind of causal framework that Scholte offers is bound to remain more or less indeterminate and vague, which is a recurrent and, indeed, intentional feature of mainstream globalization analysis.

Is there a problem here? Many academic globalization experts would answer in the negative: globalization is a multicausal and indeterminate affair and it should be analyzed as such. Period. But here is the core issue: the main argument of the kind of globalization literature that has been reviewed above does not really analyze in great detail the causal forces *behind* globalization. At the least, it is not on this terrain that the most prominent intellectual battles are being fought. More important analytically has been the attempt to turn globalization *itself* into a causal force. This is a significant distinction, on which political theorist Justin Rosenberg (2000; 2005) has focused. Rosenberg notes that any attempt to involve globalization in the explanation of social change has two alternatives: *either* it must rely on pre-established social theories (i.e. classical sociological theories of modernity or capitalism) in order to provide an answer to the question of what globalization is, how it is being caused and with what effect; *or* it must try to claim that the concept of globalization denotes a new kind of social theory in itself that will make these changes comprehensible. Rosenberg (2005, 12) argues that:

“In the former case, the explanatory standing of ‘globalization’, however great, is ultimately derivative. Indeed in the overall scheme of explanation, it remains a primarily descriptive term, identifying an *explanandum*. In the latter case, however, it becomes itself the *explanans* of the argument, and can legitimately function as such only insofar as a spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory succeeds. In this contrast lies the distinction between a ‘theory of globalization’ and Globalization Theory.”

The reference to “spatio-temporal reformulation” in this citation is very important. In order to understand the implications of it, we must go back to the basic meaning of globalization. When the concept is stripped of multiple layers of academic verbiage that have accumulated over the years, it basically refers to intensified worldwide integration or interconnectedness: “Twist and turn this word as you will, space, time and a reference to the shape of the planet are its only intrinsic contents. *Prima facie*, it contains nothing else which can be drawn upon in order to explain any real-world phenomena it is used to describe” (Rosenberg 2005, 11).

However, this kind of suspicion has not been any hindrance to academic propositions that give globalization immense explanatory power, such as the following claim: “globalization is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and

economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order” (Held et al. 1999, 7). Examples of this kind abound in academic literature and above all in public proclamations. But if globalization really is not much more than what was described above, then it becomes hard to understand what exactly is being implied in propositions according to which globalization is causing major social and cultural changes. How can something like “intensifying world-wide interconnectedness” or the process by which “borders become markedly less relevant to everyday behaviour” (Beck 2000, 20) cause anything? Isn’t it something to be explained instead?

Furthermore, how is it possible for such a mind-numbingly simple idea – increasing interconnectedness – to induce such a huge cataclysm in social and cultural theory of the 1990s and beyond? The answer is that the surface meaning of globalization rests on more sturdily built theoretical foundations: the elevation of the status of time and space as theoretical concepts and tools for sociological analysis. Already quite a while back, Giddens lamented that their importance was neglected in social theory and demanded that it “must acknowledge, as it has not done previously, time-space intersections as essentially involved in all social existence” (Giddens 1979, 54). He didn’t have to wait for long, as the rise of globalization as an academic topic in the 1990s answered to his call perfectly. In the burgeoning globalization literature, references to the “annulment of temporal/spatial distances” (Bauman 1998, 18) became more and more frequent, propelling forward the idea that spatio-temporal changes should take the centre stage in social theory.

Once again, the noteworthy issue is that the elevation of time and space has been based on a specific meaning of globalization as the explanation and not as something that needs to be explained by other means. Time and space have of course been important issues well before the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. These concepts were central, for instance, in Immanuel Kant’s transcendental idealism; he saw them as basic categories that lie behind the operation of human consciousness. In Martin Heidegger’s speculative metaphysics, spatiality and temporality were essential factors which determined the existential limits of Dasein (“being-in-the-world”). Outside philosophy, Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss gave these concepts a social anthropological twist in their *Primitive Classification* (1969 [1903]) and *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2001 [1912]), where they looked at the cultural experiences of time and space from a viewpoint that stressed their social origins, a point which has been further developed by anthropologists in cross-cultural studies. From another viewpoint, Karl Marx was interested in transformations of time and space caused by the “universalizing tendency of capital”, a theme that he explored especially in the *Grundrisse* (written in 1857–1858). So, literally speaking, Giddens’ claim that time and space were of minor interest to classical social theorists is manifestly incorrect. But it is also evident that he was not satisfied with the ways in which classical sociologists had dealt with the topic.

Giddens has made the case that time and space are constitutive features of social life, not some empty categories that have meaning only as part of some other overriding cultural or material dynamic. This is what Giddens has explicated in his discussions of “time-space distanciation” (Giddens 1981, 90ff), whose summary understanding is

necessary in order to comprehend more accurately current academic discussions of globalization.<sup>2</sup>

Giddens' interest in time and space coincides with his turn away from the analysis of nineteenth-century social theory towards historical sociology and structuration theory (Loyal 2003, 5, 93ff). His historical sociology starts from the idea – which is *prima facie* rather trivial – that all social action takes place in time and space (Giddens 1981, 38). The specificity of this thought, however, lies according to him in that it makes possible a new kind of social theory, which analyzes and compares social systems in terms of how they are organized with regard to “time-space relations” that are “constitutive features of social systems, implicated as deeply in the most stable forms of social life as in those subject to the most extreme or radical modes of change” (ibid., 30).

This is the basis of his general theory of changing social forms in history. In premodern tribal and local communities, social co-operation is based on repetitive traditions which are passed on in oral forms (myths, stories) from one generation to the next in direct face-to-face communication. In this kind of setting, social action takes place within relatively enduring local bounds. In contrast to this, modernization marks the opening up of mental horizons that displace local conceptions. With the great explorations, new forms of written records and the adoption of universal clock time, the experience of time and space changes dramatically. In modernity, people are connected to written history and far-away places in a way that was not possible for earlier generations. What we experience today – in the period of “late modernity” – is an outcome and radicalization of these processes. Giddens (1990; 1991) argues that because of (heightened) globalization the classical sociological theories which presupposed territorial boundedness of social systems need to be replaced by a problematic of “time-space distancing” as today social relations are “lifted out” or “disembedded” from both local and national contexts. The concept of society needs to be extended beyond previous boundaries.

Here we come back to the question of causation. Giddens (1990, 21ff) notes that the reordering of time and space and the stretching of social relations is caused by what he calls “disembedding mechanisms”. He outlines two major type of these mechanisms, both of which are deeply ingrained features of modernity: first, “symbolic tokens”, which equals, for all practical purposes, money; and secondly, “expert systems”. Money is a crucial component of globalization, since it enables exchange outside the confines of time and space. Similarly, expert systems – in other words, professionals and the methods by which they achieve their status and conduct their work – are designed to provide impersonal settings for social actions which follow predictable patterns regardless of their immediate local/social context.

But other mechanisms need to be taken into consideration as well. As noted, Giddens has put a high premium on the subjective dimension of globalization which is expressed, for example, in one of his still-shots of contemporary mental landscapes: “Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global” (Giddens 1991, 187). In late modernity, time-space distancing is facilitated by a new

2 Giddens' works from his *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979) onwards can be considered as pacesetters of current globalization theory. In other words, his spatio-temporal analysis of society was already existent in the late 1970s, but it became truly topical in the late 1990s with the emergence of globalization theory that is founded on similar theoretical interests and viewpoints.

kind of “mediation of experience”, that is, “the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness” (ibid., 27). Giddens (ibid., 26; 1981, 40) points out that, in modern times, the development of media and communication technology has greatly magnified this process. Especially with the advent of satellites and other types of advanced electronic communications “For the first time ever, instantaneous communication is possible from one side of the world to the other”: “Its existence alters the very texture of our lives, rich and poor alike. When the image of Nelson Mandela may be more familiar to us than the face of our next-door neighbour, something has changed in the nature of our everyday experience” (Giddens 2002, 11–12). Giddens deems the ramifications of these phenomenological tendencies so crucial that he declares that globalization “has been influenced above all by developments in systems of communication, dating back only to the late 1960s” (ibid., 10; see also Giddens 2000).

It is illustrative to look at Giddens’ arguments, especially in terms of how they exemplify the ways in which linkages between globalization and media have been forged in contemporary social theory. After reading through many influential globalization analyses, we can reconstruct the contours of a recurrent intellectual procedure that consists in four arguments. First, globalization is defined as a process of intensification of world-wide interconnections and flows; second, in order to raise the stakes, it is claimed that this phenomenon has huge causal significance in that it enforces overall social and cultural transformation; third, the elaboration of the significance of globalization is transmuted into a spatio-temporal framework that purportedly transcends previous sociological perspectives; and fourth, claims concerning the novelty of new media and communication technologies are presented in support of this framework, so as to convince the reader that we indeed live today in a qualitatively different kind of global era. Although media is only one ingredient of the argument, it should not be seen merely as a rhetorical ornament of little significance. I argue that it is a logical component of what Rosenberg (2005, 12) designates as Globalization Theory proper, that is, a specific strand of research on globalization which sees it as the prime driving force in society and culture.

The salience of media-based arguments for globalization theory is further shown by how Scholte (2000, 44–50) treats media and communications in his analysis. His mode of argumentation is in many respects similar to Giddens and Held (et al.), but it is more elaborate in terms of how media and globalization are welded together analytically. For Scholte, globalization is a qualitatively new kind of process, but in order to detect this, sophisticated theoretical and conceptual tools are required. He claims that most of the processes that have been presented as the essential, dynamic features of globalization are in fact “redundant”; they do provide a foundation for an analysis of globalization as a new social phenomenon. They need to be carefully separated from a “distinctive concept of globalization” which is meant to offer precisely this foundation. Scholte argues that in contemporary academic discussions, globalization has been synonymous with the following concepts and processes: a) internationalization, b) liberalization, c) universalization, d) westernization or modernization; and e) deterritorialization, or the rise of “supraterritoriality”. According to the first perspective, globalization is simply a new term for cross-border relations, such as foreign trade, which exist

between countries. The second definition refers to globalization as a process that is leading towards an “open” and “borderless” world economy. The third definition of globalization (universalization) sees it as an expansion of local cultural forms to such a degree that they become known worldwide, as in such cases as ethnic cuisines, the Gregorian calendar or various music genres. The fourth idea equates globalization with westernization or modernization, especially in an “Americanized” form. This points to the claim that many social and cultural structures and features that are historically distinctive to western societies (capitalism, industrialism, symphony orchestra, film, etc.) have been adopted in all parts of the world.

These four forms of globalization are, according to Scholte, “redundant”. When one tries to approach globalization on the basis of these concepts, one finds that they refer to something that has been covered many times before. What we need is a conception of globalization that will break new ground and which will require “us fundamentally to rethink some of our assumptions about social relations, particularly in relation to space” (Scholte 2000, 42). For Scholte, only the fifth definition of globalization (as the rise of supraterritoriality) will help us to achieve this. This perspective refers to globalization as a process that weakens the ties of culture to place and causes social relations to disengage from the restrictions of time and space and former “territorial” settings. This is exactly the view that is predominant in contemporary social and cultural theory. According to Scholte, only the perspective of supraterritoriality refers to something that is historically new, and only it can help to identify those features that have real explanatory power in terms of what globalization is and what lies behind its emergence.

What is noteworthy about supraterritoriality is that Scholte sees it to be a consequence of technological innovations in transportation and media and communications. The latter take central stage in Scholte’s argument. Ever since the birth of printing, advancements in media technology – continuous acceleration of communication by the succession of one type of electronic means with another – has led to continuous reduction of the significance of location and distance as limiting factors in human connectivity, without overturning them for good. Especially with the invention and expansion of “new media”, however, territorial distance is suddenly of little significance as “distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial boundaries present no particular impediment” (Scholte 2000, 48; Rosenberg 2000, 24). It is this very feature that allegedly compels the use of new theories and concomitant concepts, like “transworld simultaneity and instantaneity”:

“Global conditions like Internet connections can and do surface simultaneously at any point on earth that is equipped to host them. Global phenomena like a news flash can and do move almost instantaneously across any distance on the planet.” (Scholte 2000, 48)

Scholte emphasizes that globalization is different from international relations and activities of previous ages. The political, cultural, economic and social authority of nations and geographically fixed territories is receding because of increasing

supraterritoriality, which signals the rise of a new kind of “territorial logic”. Thus, he wants to bid “farewell to methodological territorialism” (ibid., 56; see also Beck 2000, 64–68) and to replace it with the idea of how transformations of time and space compel renewal of social theory. Theoretically, Scholte’s move is inventive but it is also fraught with contradictions that are not easily resolved. When he discusses causal factors behind globalization, he notes that “an explanation of globalization that considers only technological forces is both superficial and incomplete” (Scholte 2000, 100). On the other hand, when he makes statements about the novelty of globalization, he has no other strategy than to ground these on precisely media-technological arguments. These also constitute the essence of how globalization is presented as a causal force in its own right, of how its arrival enforces a qualitative break with previous forms of social and cultural relations. Beck, too, is under the spell of media and communications. For him, contemporary globalization is “historically specific” in one particular sense that he thinks deserves extended italics:

“The peculiarity of the present, and future, globalization process lies in the empirically ascertainable *scale, density and stability of regional-global relationship networks and their self-definition through the mass media, as well as of social spaces and of image-flows at a cultural, political, economic and military level.*” (Beck 2000, 12)

Based on the foregoing outlines and examples, I propose, although tentatively at this stage, that media and communications play a constitutive role in mainstream academic globalization debates. Certainly the literature of globalization is huge and media are not central in all of it. But they are of central strategic importance for the logical structure of the abovementioned “spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory” (Rosenberg 2005, 12) since the 1990’s. The development of media and communication technology, in particular, is a pet subject among a number of prominent social and cultural theorists who have presented arguments in favour of making globalization a substantive research program. For many analysts, the processes of globalization are in a fundamental sense caused by these technological changes. In their mind, this also creates a need to reassess the basic presuppositions of social theory. The idea that new media and communication technologies should form the basis for social and cultural analysis (as opposed to, say, economy, gender, polity or ethnicity) has gained more strength in the last two decades. I will discuss the implications of this significant intellectual development – which I call the mediatization of social theory – at length in Chapter 7.

## 2.4 Three Phases in the Academic Study of Globalization

In the previous section, I have concentrated on a branch of academic literature that has stressed, above all, the significance of globalization as a theoretical issue. What I have offered does not, of course, paint an exhaustive picture of its subject matter. But it does refer to a momentous body of work without which globalization theory would not exist



as a distinctive program. Speaking of the recent works of Giddens, Beck, Held, Castells, Scholte and Bauman, Rosenberg (2005, 4–5) notes that

“it was upon their success or failure that the overall provenance of the concept of ‘globalization’ ultimately depended. Success would finally anchor the premise which was operative across the field – namely that the term ‘globalization’ identified the causality involved in a fundamental transformation of social existence. Failure would leave it adrift on the same tide of intellectual fashion which first raised it to prominence, and without any independent intellectual ability to hold its position when that tide receded.”

But has the tide receded? The truth-value of Rosenberg’s (2005, 3) claim that “the age of globalization’ is over” – that it can no longer capture the essence of what is going on in the world – remains to be verified by future developments. Irrespective of many criticisms that can be raised against central notions of globalization theory, and even though the concept has been used so frequently that it is engendering a certain amount of weariness, it still has a central place in contemporary social and cultural sciences. Although the above-mentioned attempts at a complete revision of social theory in the name of globalization are essential parts of this particular field of theorization, it should be kept in mind that the efficacy of globalization in academia does not rest on their shoulders alone. The subject has been incorporated into the heartlands of many different disciplines. This has generated perspectives that are not identical with the strong globalization theory programme discussed above, since such perspectives are shaped by variable baselines that are specific to these disciplines. Yet without doubt, globalization continues to affect them all. Understood in this broad sense, the academic study of globalization has by now a history of its own. This is illustrated by the fact that we can now trace different stages in the development of the academic study of globalization. The outline that I offer in the following is meant to serve as a clarification of where we stand today in relation to the development of the topic.

1) Preliminary phase (from mid-1980s to mid-1990s). While the concept of globalization dates back to the mid-twentieth century (e.g. Scholte 2000, 43), it emerged as a substantive research topic in the mid-to-late 1980s. The first book titles with the name “globalization” appeared at that time, which also witnessed the beginning of international conferences on the concept, one of the earliest of which offered contributions from such luminaries as Immanuel Wallerstein and Stuart Hall (Denning 2004, 17ff). At this stage, the central idea by many authors who took part in the conversation was to call into question the standing of “the nationally defined society [as] the most appropriate unit either for cultural or for social analysis” (King 1991b, 3). What was characteristic for this period was that many pioneering participants in the discussion attempted to relocate their previous concerns onto a global plane. Yet analyses in favour of a new global perspective remained relatively embryonic – preliminary ideas requiring further clarification rather than full-fledged theoretical



programmes – and they showed up, primarily, in the form of articles which were then published in collective anthologies (e.g. Albrow and King 1990; Featherstone 1990; King 1991a). At this stage, as Jameson (1998, xvi) noted, globalization referred to “a space of tension, in which the very ‘problematic’ of globalization still remains to be produced”.<sup>3</sup>

2) Crystallization phase (from mid-1990s to the turn of the millennium). In the early 1990s Robertson (1992, 49) expressed his concern that globalization “will become an intellectual ‘play zone’, a site for the expression of residual social-theoretical interests”, instead of becoming an autonomous field of research with unique standpoints. Subsequent developments seemed to nullify these worries. By the mid-1990s, Featherstone and Lash (1995, 1) already claimed that globalization should be seen “as now no longer emergent, but as a more fully emerged theory in social sciences”. While in hindsight this comment is a bit premature, notable books on globalization started to appear around this time – for example, the first book-length introduction to academic globalization perspectives (Waters 1995). More importantly, the first programmatic analyses of the subject started to come out, peaking at the turn of the millennium (Albrow 1996; Beck 1997b; Bauman 1998; Giddens 1999; Tomlinson 1999; Held et al. 1999; Scholte 2000). With these books, globalization became operationalized, a subject with fully developed perspectives and theoretical models. This was also the period when globalization studies exploded in quantitative terms and the concept became the staple of academic conversation (see figure 1 above; Waters 2001, 2; Roudometof 2003, 55).

3) Entrenchment phase (since the turn of the millennium). After the publication of what now seem to be the key works on globalization, the subject has become “normalized” in academia. What I mean by this is that – based on the ideas that were developed in the earlier phase – globalization has been identified as a major topic that has a distinctive place in the curricula of various disciplines and in their standard text-books (e.g. Barker 2000; Ritzer and Goodman 2003). Extensive globalization readers became available around the turn of the decade, after which they have gone through revisions (e.g. Lechner and Boli 2000; Held and McGrew 2000a). New articles and books on globalization keep appearing and not only for scientific reasons: “Globalization is currently a cash cow for Polity Press”, as one commentator (Marinetto 2005, 376) remarks, and this holds true for many other publishing houses as well, at least for the time being. New journals and professional associations around the theme have also emerged, exemplified by the start-up of *Globalizations* in 2004, a journal that focuses “on globalization in a broad interdisciplinary context” (Rosenau 2004, 7). Interestingly, this journal emerges from the field of “international relations”, which is in many ways antithetical to what globalization theorists propose with their critique of the nation state-centrism and territorialism. In this sense, the notion of globalization – as it is understood in mainstream globalization theory – has Moloch-like qualities: it wants the sacrifice of disciplinary variations and their displacement with its own grand perspective. Thus, feeding the Moloch, Rosenau (ibid.) is worried over the fact that

3 This statement originates from a conference on cultural globalization that was held in 1994.

“long-standing disciplinary habits and professional orthodoxies inhibit inquiries into the multidisciplinary nature of globalization”. Similarly, in the field of media studies, *Global Media and Communications* was launched in 2005, with its editors pointing to “an urgent need for a new and explicitly global forum to articulate the dynamic developments in this rapidly growing area of academic activity” (Thussu et al. 2005, 5). These propositions, which can be found across the board in social sciences, attest to the continuing power of globalization.

Many exponents of current globalization studies seem to agree that whatever difficulties there are in the ways in which the topic is being discussed, it is an idea that needs to be developed further. In line with this, sociologist Saskia Sassen (in Gane 2004, 128) states boldly – regardless of the veritable avalanche of globalization research – that the topic is “still rare enough deep in the academy”. In a certain sense, the continuous interest in globalization is logical: next to all the material and intellectual resources that have been allocated to studies concerning its various dimensions, the suggestion that “the age of globalization is over” comes across as preposterous.

As globalization has been such a success story in academia, it is easy to draw the conclusion that the key ideas of globalization – its multi-dimensionality, contingency, etc. – are by now relatively uncontroversial and well-established (see e.g. Tomlinson 2003, 272). This perception is supported by the fact that globalization has already been neutralized as a concept insofar that it can be used in academic literature in much the same way that other keywords like society, ideology or modernization have been used for a long time. The uses vary, of course: while at times globalization carries a lot of analytic weight, on many occasions it is presented merely as a loose descriptive term without further elaborations. This looseness, however, has not been much of an impediment to the fashionableness of the subject matter; indeed, the powerful imaginative hold of globalization seems to be connected to its standing as a very general term beneath which several academic subtopics (cosmopolitanism, hybridization, diasporic cultures, postcolonialism, mobility, networks, etc.) cross-breed with each other. It appears that after one has adopted basic viewpoints of globalization, suddenly all relevant social and cultural developments seem to be connected to it in more or less direct ways. Its appeal is so strong that even critics of mainstream globalization perspectives have given the concept a central analytical status in their work (e.g. Sklair 2002). However, the overall picture is not quite so unequivocal. The triumphant march of globalization in academia has not gone on without challenge, and this needs to be discussed next, especially as the critique of both the concept of globalization and academic globalization theory has intensified in the last couple of years (see Held and McGrew 2007, 1–3).

## 2.5 Theoretical Faultlines between “Transformationalists” and “Sceptics”

In spite of the capacity of globalization to appear in innumerable scholarly contexts and to take the centre stage in social theory, it strongly resembles that which Gallie (1962)

has called “an essentially contested concept”. By this, Gallie referred to such concepts as democracy, justice, art or religion, which indicate the realization of certain important societal or cultural goals and purposes. Because of the importance that these concepts convey, their meanings are also fervently debated and, as a consequence, “there is no one clearly definable general use of any of them which can be set up as the correct or standard use” (ibid., 122). In the contemporary public arena, the most heated debates on globalization have raged between neoliberal proponents of global markets and their critics from the left. This friction is not absent in academic studies of globalization which are, however, based on a different dispute. The main faultline in academic globalization discussions runs between “sceptics” and “transformationalists” (Held and McGrew 2000b),<sup>4</sup> whose viewpoints should be distinguished theoretically from both the mentioned public debates and also from each other. This dualistic account of academic globalization perspectives is naturally a crude one, since it does not take stock of the diversity of viewpoints that individual authors present in their work. But this is also not what it is meant to uncover; it refers to ideal-type constructions or heuristic devices that identify “the primary lines of argument [...] rooted in the globalization literature but by definition corresponding to no single work, author or ideological position” (ibid., 2).

What both sceptics and transformationalists acknowledge is that the grandiose claims made by neoliberal “hyperglobalizers” (Held et al. 1999, 3–5) should be taken with a grain of salt. Thereafter, however, the consensus gives way to a disagreement between these two opposing positions. I have already discussed a number of main ideas that guide the transformationalist position which represent currently hegemonic perspectives, so a brief summary is sufficient here. For transformationalists, “contemporary globalization is a real and significant historical development” (Held and McGrew 2000b, 2) which points to important reorderings in the way that the economy, political power and sense of identity is organized. Their focus is on movements and flows instead of structures and borders. While the overall outcome of globalization is necessarily indeterminate, exponents of “the transformationalist thesis” seek to offer new concepts and perspectives that highlight definite changes in different levels of social and cultural existence: the intensification of material and non-material flows, the erosion of fixed cultural identities, new global division of labour and the emergence of multilayered global governance or even a new cosmopolitan society. The discourse of globalization offers a way of speaking about these disparate features jointly and thus it acts as a powerful concept in contemporary social and cultural theory.

The sceptics, for their part, doubt the explanatory value and analytical utility of the concept of globalization. The reasons for this scepticism are various (for a more detailed description, see Steger 2002, 20ff). First of all, as globalization is meant to encompass such a huge number of aspects simultaneously, many critics argue that it is expected to do too much theoretical work: “It is certainly comprehensive, but it lacks conceptual specificity” (Sklair 2002, 39). Because of this, it should be broken down into “smaller” concepts that refer to particular social and cultural developments in more manageable

4 In fact, in this work they write of “globalists” in the academia instead of “transformationalists” which is the term they use in Held et al. 1999. However, as the term “globalist” can easily be mistaken for advocates of the ideology of “globalism”, I instead propose to use the term “transformationalist” or “transformationalism”.

ways, or replaced altogether with existing concepts that describe international aspects of trade, cultural exchange and social relations. The basic attitude of sceptics is that mainstream globalization researchers exaggerate the structural changes in the world economy and world-wide political order. For them, the word globalization, as used by transformationalists, does not adequately express certain key empirical developments in human relations. When one looks, for example, at economic dealings between different parts of the globe, one finds that they are heavily concentrated on Europe, East Asia and North America, and also that they are constituted mainly of intra-firm transactions between major corporations. In a closely related way, sceptics have undertaken statistically-based analysis of trade in world economy and volume in the international labour market, concluding that it is less integrated than before the outbreak of World War One. Another sceptical argument is that the mightiest nation states still control the global system by wielding military and economic power and that this will be so in all probability also in the future, because international geopolitics is unlikely to deviate too much from its realist power assessments (this is, of course, discussed so as to counter the globalist claim about the demise of interstate geopolitics). Arguments such as these insist that to speak of the contemporary world economy and polity as having been “globalized” beyond previous levels is a case of painting a rosy picture of an integrated world – a very convenient myth, from the perspective of leading corporations and their ideological apologists – which ignores the continuing power of leading national societies or regional blocs and the attendant patterns of inequality that plague less fortunate territories.

All of these notions and remarks are debated in countless journal articles, textbooks and case studies. I will not step into these manifold argumentative paths, since it would lead me too deep into globalization debates in economics and political theory, which lie beyond the scope of my study. What I am interested in here, instead, is the consideration of the type of general methodological frameworks that guide the positions of transformationalists and sceptics, and what causes them to differ from each other, especially since this has a direct bearing on the question of how the media has emerged as a topic in globalization analyses. It should be noted that irrespective of the attention that fashionable topics regularly gain in the social and cultural sciences, much of the research that is done in these fields is based on well-established traditions. The same holds true for globalization, even though it is often presented as a new paradigm of its own (e.g. Albrow 1996; see also Held and McGrew 2007, 5).

According to Held and McGrew, the prime distinction between sceptical and transformationalist accounts of globalization is that the first operates on the basis of monocausal and the latter on the basis of multicausal strategies of explanation.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of matters of disagreement in transformationalist analyses, the principle that unifies them consists in the fact that their authors aim at highlighting the contingency and multiplicity of globalization on the basis of “a Weberian and/or post-Marxist and post-structuralist understanding of social reality as constituted by a number of distinct

<sup>5</sup> Here one should note the rhetorical strategy with which these globalization theory advocates construct their dualism. In standard public usage, a sceptic often refers to a person who doubts generally accepted views, such as sceptics of global warming. This connotation, in connection with the claim that the sceptical position on globalization is one-dimensional (monocausal) while the other is comprehensive (multicausal), suggests the superiority of the latter.

institutional orders or networks of power: the economic, technological, political, cultural, natural, etc.” (Held and McGrew 2000b, 6).

The reference to historical sociology – an intellectual tradition that runs from Max Weber to Anthony Giddens and which has gained immense recognition with the publication of major studies by Norbert Elias, Fernand Braudel and Michael Mann (see Smith 1991) – is revealing, because the transformationalist commitment on explanatory pluralism is clearly indebted to it. All of the aforementioned authors have dealt with the emergence of western civilizations from a perspective that is informed by a detailed analysis of the interplay between political hierarchies, economy and culture. Mann (1986; 1993), in particular, in his studies that aim at showing how different material and non-material factors have contributed to social stratification in known history, claims that no form of social power has had primacy over the others. According to Mann, there are four of them: economic, ideological, political and military (cf. Held et al. 1999). For historical sociologists and globalization analysts of this variety, the main focus is on a transhistorical process, which they examine through a general “idea” (whether it is that of “rationalization”, “modernization”, “the civilizing process”, or “globalization”). These concepts help to organize the study of a long history, the description and illustration of which targets a huge number of instances of transformation in human action and social structures. As the focus is on a broad trend covering centuries or even millennia, it is only logical that its guiding dynamics are given less treatment or are deemed so complex that they ultimately constitute something like a “patterned mess”, a term that Mann (1993, 4) uses to describe societies in general.

The suggestion that transformationalist accounts of globalization are based on post-Marxist or poststructuralist perspectives is similarly understandable; it can be demonstrated, for example, via the concept of overdetermination. Louis Althusser (2005 [1962]) relied on this concept in an attempt to purge Marxism of what he saw as simplistic recourse to economic dynamics (contradiction between the forces and relations of production) in historical materialist analyses. Overdetermination, for Althusser, meant that social change is caused by many kinds of circumstances and social forces; it does not take place merely because of what goes on in the economic sphere. He entered the qualification, however, that the economy still determines “in the last instance”. There is a hierarchy among the historically contingent events and factors that induce large-scale social upheavals; economic practices are necessarily more dominant than others. Later, Resnick and Wolff (1987) argued that Althusser was being too cautious in making this qualification, for the full implication of the concept of overdetermination is that it rules out the notion that analytical priority should be given to some social process or processes over others; instead, the dilemmas of determinism can be avoided by focusing on “the complex ‘fitting together’ of all social aspects, their relational structure [and] the contradictions overdetermined in each by all” (ibid., 50; Glassman 2003, 683). This has been a necessary dictum as they, in tune with the intellectual climate of post-1989 times, have worked their way “towards a poststructuralist political economy” or “postmodern Marxism” – projects whose resonance with transformationalist globalization accounts and contemporary positions in cultural studies is palpable.

The problem with this kind of recourse to explanatory pluralism is in that it leaves too many doors open. While sceptics agree that society is formed and goes through changes because of the interplay of many different forces, they start from the assumption that explanatory primacy needs to be accorded to some form of social power over the others. The critics of mainstream globalization perspectives are, in many cases, closely attached to Marxist-materialist starting points (see Waters 2001, 210ff). From that perspective, it is not necessary to assume – monocausally – that globalization is driven by some cast-iron economic law which alone determines the course of events. Yet the critics of globalization theory indeed tend to highlight the dynamics of capitalist economy as the prime component of globalization.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Sklair (2002, 47) asserts that “global capitalism [...] is the most potent force for change in the world today”. This emphasis is related to the idea, often expressed by “sceptics”, that social change associated with globalization is not totally or even essentially contingent, as certain outcomes of it are more probable than others; there are enduring features of social organization which have taken root during the *longue durée* of capitalism, which is not at an end.

Given that we have these two broad alternatives, which one is more satisfactory? It is, of course, possible to think that both of them are necessary ingredients of a comprehensive globalization theory (or theory of globalization) to be created through a synthesis of their perspectives. Held and McGrew (2000b, 38) point out that there is some common ground between the two camps on a general level – for instance, both the sceptics and transformationalists agree that economic interconnectedness has uneven consequences for different regions, or that forms of international governance (EU, WTO) have been expanding; thus the debate “does not simply comprise ships passing in the night”. However, the theoretical foundations of sceptics and transformationalists are so different that any attempt to forge a happy union in which their basic scientific assumptions are matched together is bound to meet significant difficulties. This is also acknowledged indirectly by Held and McGrew (*ibid.*), who note that while there is much to be learned from both sides, in the end the debate raises questions regarding how these schools differ from each other in terms of how they interpret empirical evidence and position themselves with regard to conceptualizations, causal dynamics, historical trajectory of globalization as well as its socio-economic and political implications (see Held et al. 1999, 10ff). What one can realistically hope, if one wants to hang onto the idea of scientific progress, is that even though certain incompatibilities cannot be wished away, the debate between transformationalists and sceptics can be a dialogue which makes them both at least more informed and sophisticated and in this way enlivens the overall globalization discussion.

The central criticism against the sceptical or critical globalization perspective – that it is economically reductionist – has been made repeatedly in recent literature. It is an issue on which different mainstream globalization theorists agree whole-heartedly (e.g. Beck 2000, 10–11; Held et al. 1999, 2–28). Contemporary Marxists and political economists are, of course, well aware of this charge. They have tried to counter it by relying on more modestly formulated arguments, while still adhering to the central idea

6 The “realists” in political science (e.g. Gilpin 2002) is another group that is highly critical of globalization theory and especially the notion of cosmopolitanism therein. Since this study is mainly about sociological and cultural theory, I will not cover the work of political realists here.

that material reality should be foregrounded. Stuart Hall (1986, 43) has put forward one version of this by noting that the economy indeed does not determine “in the last instance”, as in Althusser’s structural interpretation, but it still determines “in the first instance”. This distinction is not merely a semantic one. What it aims at is the idea that while economic dynamics do not yield a complete explanation of all human activities, they are still decisive and always connected to these activities (Golding and Murdock 1996, 15). Because of the essentially capitalist logic by which our social relations are molded, they should be kept in the back of the mind when conducting sociological or cultural analyses. Notions such as these testify to the need of sceptics to come up with more refined methodological frameworks to counter their critics. At the same time, they are offered to counter the fact that many currently influential frameworks, such as cultural studies, postmodern theory and globalization theory, “have spent much time and effort inveighing against ‘economism’” (Robotham 2005, 7), thus risking to drop the issue of material production altogether. Against this development in the Western academia, the desire for more materialistically-oriented analyses is understandable, especially in the light of how universities themselves have at the same time been forced to adjust to the demands of the markets more than ever before.

The question of economic determination is the main cause for the division in the debate between transformationalists and their sceptical critics. Exponents of the transformationalist school find that their stand-point offers a neat way to avoid the problems that haunt the critical position. Because they see that societal development is dictated by many kinds of autonomous dynamics, they also find that any deviation from explanatory pluralism leads inevitably to the slippery slope of reductionism and monism, which is to be avoided at any cost. This attitude, however, is not without deficiencies of its own. Writing about the central theoretical questions that arise when incorporating Marxism into media studies, Mike Wayne (2003, 138) offers this double exposure that serves as a reminder of the intellectual challenges that both the sceptics and transformationalists face:

“Any analysis of the social order has to navigate between two pitfalls: on the one hand, can the concept of mode of production avoid collapsing into a *monocausal* account of the social order in which the hierarchy of determinants is asserted but at the cost of reducing the complexity of the world to a single essence; and can it avoid this pitfall while avoiding the liberal model of sheer *multicausality* in which a variety of factors can be admitted to have powerful effects but any sense of a systematically structured social hierarchy of forces disappears in favour of more or less equal plurality?”

This dilemma lies at the heart of globalization analysis. It also points to the problematic nature of the transformationalist argument. Explanatory pluralism has shortcomings that call into question the degree of certainty that they have when they argue against the reductionism of critics of globalization theory. If the sceptics risk reifying globalization as a phenomenon, transformationalist arguments are in danger of



submerging into the murky waters of eclecticism, which is detrimental in trying to gain a critical understanding of the “big picture”.

Like the sceptics, the transformationalists are aware of the charges that have been laid at their door. In dealing with them, Held et al. (1999) return to the issue of complexity. In general, they note that any “attempt to specify the driving forces [...] has to be carefully qualified in as much as definitive causal generalizations about socio-historical processes are inherently problematic”. It is even more problematic with contemporary globalization, because of “the confluence of globalizing tendencies within all key domains of social interaction”. “Thus it is the particular conjuncture of developments – within political, military, economic, migratory, cultural and ecological domains – and the complex interactions among these which reproduce the distinctive form and dynamics of contemporary globalization”. The authors point out that the driving forces behind globalization are in a contingent relation to each other because at different historical times some globalizing factors have been more significant than others; also, the different spheres should not be analytically separated too much since “to understand contemporary globalization fully requires an exploration of the conjuncture of globalizing forces and the dynamics of their mutual interaction” (ibid., 437).

All of this seems to be guided by a sociologically up-to-date common sense. However, what we are left with is not a concrete attempt to single out hierarchies and patterns in the “mutual interactions”, but the exhortation to be content with “conjunctural analysis”. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the analysis of conjunctures as such, but in the work of the mentioned authors, it becomes an empirical description of contingent social and cultural developments that are mediated primarily by the association that they have with the word “globalization”. Although Held and his co-authors list factors that have had an influence on contemporary forms of globalization, this list is so open-ended and the interactions between different factors is deemed so directionless that the history and theory of globalization which they seek to uncover becomes effectively “an undetermined concatenation of events and personalities, which varies randomly from one situation to the next” (Rosenberg 2005, 35). What this amounts to is that it is more difficult for a cogent social theory of globalization to emerge from their writings (ibid., 28), even though this is explicitly attempted (Held et al. 1999, 11ff). It is highly symptomatic that Urry (2003), after noting that globalization has not been theorized enough (however much has been written about it), tries to remedy the situation by suggesting that globalization should be analyzed along the lines of complexity or chaos theory – a source of inspiration that is especially prone to cause all kinds of strange reductions, over-simplifications and false juxtapositions when applied to sociology and historical comparison of social changes (see McLennan 2003, especially pages 553–560).

These problems relate to the idea of multiple determinations behind globalization. In this context, one should also recall another central tenet of the mainstream globalization perspective that was discussed earlier: forceful theoretical investment in spatio-temporal changes. This feature is much less acknowledged by mainstream globalization analysts, and it raises doubts about their claim that their work is multicausal and pluralistic in



its orientation. While it is possible, in theory, to imagine and analyze unlimited aspects of globalization (religion, sexuality, sport, food, pollution, human rights, etc.), it is not the case that the basic determining factors behind these aspects are different in each individual case. Certain theoretical tendencies, determinants or modes of explanation are more visible in mainstream globalization theorists' literature than others. This limits the inclusiveness of their self-proclaimed pluralistic outlook. It is one thing to claim that one operates within an anti-essentialist and anti-reductionist framework, and quite another to hold onto this principle in practice.

I have already noted the specifically technological resonance of Scholte's (2000) theorization and definition of globalization. The same resonance is also discernable in Held et al. (1999), even though they, too, try to avoid any unmediated association with it. But it seems to be the logical and unavoidable consequence that follows from the fundamental theoretical engagements that characterize globalization theory literature. Held and his co-authors (*ibid.*, 15) emphasize that globalization is, when we get down to it, about "extensive spatial connections"; without reference to these, "there can be no clear or coherent formulation of this term". It thus becomes understandable why they are, in line with many other key globalization theorists, so fascinated with information technologies and seem to subscribe to the common myth (see Mosco 2004) according to which "in a world of instantaneous communication, distance and time no longer seem to be a major constraint on patterns of human social organization or interaction" (Held et al. 1999, 15; see also Chapter 4, pages 138–139). In the same register, after discussing the multiplicity of forces behind globalization and their complex interactions, they make room for a specifically technological argument. While there are expansionary tendencies in "political, military, economic, migratory, cultural and ecological systems", information technologies are *sui generis*, since only they hold the key to the cardinal logic of globalization: the mediation of all of these systems "by the late twentieth-century communications and transport revolution which has facilitated globalization across every domain of social activity and dramatically expanded [...] global interaction capacity" (*ibid.*, 436–437).

What I argue is that the main faultline in academic globalization research (as it links with social and cultural theory) does not run between monism and pluralism. While many leading globalization theorists see that this question constitutes the main theoretical battleground, it is more likely a secondary theatre of operations. Emphatic charges against reductionism by transformationalists serve to hide their own theoretical choices and emphases. The distinction between monism versus pluralism does indisputably feature in the debate, but after reviewing the methodological grounds and key ideas on which different perspectives are based, other factors enter the picture. It seems to me that the central dividing issue concerns the question of particular determinations: what are the specific tendencies to which different globalization authors alert us, and what do they hold to be primary in analyzing the process?

All theories, by their nature, have deterministic elements; even the more or less "multicausal" analyses by different globalization theorists have them. Otherwise they would not be theories at all. As we have seen in this Chapter, academic globalization theory is characterized by its tendency to reduce everything to the question of

how time-space relations have changed and moved us into a new global world. I want to draw attention to this for two reasons. First, the question of determination is important for the present study, as it sheds light on the ways in which media and communications have been analyzed in the context of globalization better than the dualistic account that was presented above. Second, what I have reviewed above as the mainstream (transformationalist) globalization theory perspective has become a natural attitude that has invoked knee-jerk charges of reductionism aimed against its adversaries in many instances. Held and McGrew (2000b, 38; 2007, 1ff) give merit to the “sceptical” analysis of globalization, but only insofar as it serves to refine their own transformationalist position. Naturally, this leaves unexamined the weaknesses of transformationalist arguments themselves, the critical analysis of which is the main issue in this study.

So far, I have presented the overall context of scholarly globalization discussion and some of the most common starting-points and ideas that define this discussion. The generic premise of much academic globalization research is the idea that “interconnectedness” is the single most important feature of human societies past and present. As this Chapter has shown, globalization theorists have offered this idea as the fulcrum of a new social theory, supporting it, crucially, with arguments concerning new media and communication technologies. The various theoretical links that exist between globalization theory and the media will become more evident and precise later, in Parts II and III of this study. First, however, in order to understand those links better, we need to discuss media and its theory in more elaborate terms.

### 3. KEY APPROACHES TO MEDIA AND THE QUESTION OF GLOBALIZATION

There are several reasons to emphasize the connections between media and academic globalization theory. First, arguments concerning media and communication technologies are powerfully present in globalization theory. In particular, they are of strategic importance for the “spatial reformulation of social theory”, which is central for academic globalization discussions in general. Second, many globalization researchers, both those sociologically and culturally oriented, have incorporated arguments from media theorists and researchers into their programmes. While this has not always been done extensively, many key authors of globalization have made references to them in order to support their overall viewpoints. In any case, there are many commonalities between the ways in which, for example, cultural globalization theorists and culturally oriented media researchers have approached the issue of media and globalization. In fact, today the dividing lines between what is globalization theory and what is media theory have become increasingly indistinct. Third, the notion of globalization has increasingly reoriented work in media research itself. One indication of this is the fact that many respected international as well as more regionally based journals in media research and theory – like *Media, Culture & Society*, *New Media & Society*, *Asian Journal of Communication* or *European Journal of Communication*, to name just few – have published a great number of articles that connect to this topic over the last 10 years, not to speak of the launch of *Global Media and Communication* in 2005, which is most overt in its attempt to merge media and globalization together as subjects of analysis. What I argue, then, is that today media theory and globalization theory are intertwined intellectual enterprises. For this reason and in light of the present study, it makes sense to take a closer look at academic approaches to media in order to see how they are connected to the topic of globalization.

This task has its complexities, specifically because we are immediately faced with ambiguities concerning the subject matter itself (media) and the boundaries of the field in question (which I term here as media research and media theory). This indetermination is reflected in the varying ways in which such terms as “mass communications”, “communication studies”, “media studies” or simply “communication” have been used in different historical and national contexts in order to identify the field. The demarcations between these designations are anything but clear; they point to a perennial debate on the question of what should constitute the proper focus of media (or communication) research. I will not attempt to present a solution to that debate. Rather, I will proceed, first, by clarifying the concept of media from an analytical-historical perspective and, second, by shedding light on the nature of media research as a distinctive intellectual realm with several theoretical approaches.

### 3.1 The Concept of Media and its Problems

If there is one issue on which media researchers today are often in agreement, it is the claim that the concept of media has become increasingly difficult to define. The often stated reason for this is media-technological convergence, a process based on digitalization and especially on the public diffusion of the internet as well as the current generation of mobile telephones. These new technologies have shaken received notions of what mass communication is and how it is separate from interpersonal communication, conducted today with an array of new digital applications (mobile phones, the internet, etc.). Thus, when I refer to “media” in this study, I do it with an awareness of how “the convergence of communication and computer technologies [has] greatly extend[ed] the range of possible signification of the term” (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold 1995, 3).

But even before these technological changes, the concept of media was problematic. Obviously, media (as the plural of medium) can indicate any material that carries symbolic meanings or facilitates interpersonal communication and social co-ordination. Adhering to this principle, Canadian cultural philosopher Marshall McLuhan (1964) developed a broad theory of media in which he included such items as clothing, money, clocks, bicycles, games and weapons. Yet McLuhan is mostly famous for his analyses of a much more limited list of media, and this brings his work closer to how the concept is conventionally understood. Raymond Williams (1976, 203) points out that the plural form “media” arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a “specialized capitalist sense”: it signified the use of newspapers and, later, broadcasting as media for advertising. On the other hand, the huge popularity of the concept since the 1950s reflects the fact that, by that time at the latest, everyday life and the public sphere throughout the world had become entangled with specific institutions and technologies that were responsible for the creation, reproduction and distribution of symbolic products of many kinds. Because of the emergence of newspapers, news agencies, mass-marketed books, magazines, comics, cinema, radio and television, media became “the necessary general word” (*ibid.*) by which they could be identified in the aggregate.

In this traditional sense, media refers mainly to a distinctive form of social communication, namely, mass communication. It is essentially about one-way or monological flow of communication from relatively small number of producers to an indefinite amount of recipients (Thompson 1995, 26, 84). However, terms like “mass communication” or “mass media” are rarely used in academic discourses today. One of the reasons is that the term “mass” carries with it the derogatory perception that the recipients of modern media are a singular and mindless herd devoid of rational agency, a view that is founded on the long history of conservative elite fear of the “common people”. It is a view that has been duly criticized by a number of scholars, most eloquently by Williams (1958, 297–300). As a counter-argument, it can be proposed that the term “mass communication” does not necessarily refer negatively to the nature of audiences but to “the paradox between its usual individualised mode of reception and its vast productive and distributive networks” (Corner 1998, 41). However, “mass communication” has a close historical association with those media that were developed

during the period between the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The use of the term is problematic in the current period, where the advent of digital information and communication technologies, in tandem with developments in the more traditional media industries, have altered the ways in which symbolic content is produced and consumed, and with what social consequences. In this sense, the word media comes across as more current.

Yet conceptual difficulties do not end here, for today there are intellectual struggles over the proper use of “media” – based on the same technological reasons that were mentioned above. An indication of this is the discussion concerning the notion of “old” versus “new” media. For Hartley (2002, 142), “old” media refers to content industries (e. g. magazines, television, recorded music) that aimed at reaching very large audiences. “New media”, in contrast, marks a new epoch of radical change, because with the help of digital technologies, “information can be reshaped easily, allowing for interactive services” and audiences “can alter the signals at the delivery point in order to specify what it is they wish to see, thus creating their own content” (ibid., 165). Furthermore, “the one-to-many model of media has been superseded, and now ‘content’ has integrated with telecommunications and computer interactivity, allowing ‘many-to-many’ communication, including private individual to private individual” (ibid., 143).

The problem with these statements is not that they point to real trends that are seminal for the understanding of what “media” means nowadays. Rather, it is that they put forward a strong dichotomy between the so-called old and new media. They advance a bold proposition that “one-to-many model of media” is no longer of any importance and assume rather hastily that we could include all forms of interpersonal communication, now conducted via a whole array of computerized applications, in a meaningful way in the concept of “media”. It is important to notice that these assumptions are often made from a technologically-centred perspective, according to which the development of “new media” is leading towards all kinds of emancipatory progress: decentralization or de-massification both of media production and consumption, greater choice, individualized use and interactivity instead of mass passivity – all in all, greater individual agency. Such information-society idealism needs to be countered but I do it here only briefly, in order to think through the conceptual and theoretical reconsiderations that these technologies are claimed to necessitate. Furthermore, while there are many kinds of “new” media, I will restrict my observations to the internet and its many applications, as these lie at the heart of discussions concerning the transformation of the media today.

The internet is often characterized as a multifunctional media that incorporates many kinds of activities in its technological infrastructure. According to Wall (2003, 112), “perhaps the most transformative aspect of the internet is its capability to foster networks of interaction that are distributed across almost infinite spans of space, whilst also converging in a range of different information technologies”. Slevin (2000, 73) emphasizes that the internet “is a relatively open communication system” that does not “require large-scale expert systems for the production of content”. Today, we have a large array of different software applications dedicated to video sharing, social networking, blogging, gaming, etc., which have broadened the possibilities of using the internet in that sense. For Slevin (2000, *passim*), the main impact of the internet is

that it changes previous forms of social interaction, develops new ways of experiencing community and facilitates the play with self-identity through virtual forms of human association which replace or accompany former institutional and cultural settings. As we will see, similar notions of new media transformations are strongly present in globalization theory as well.

Such novelties are only one part of the picture, however. While the internet is a medium that offers a virtual space for new kinds of social interactions and facilitates multidirectional information flows, it has, at the same time, qualities that integrate it into the logic of broadcast media. Much of what is offered for public consumption in the internet is produced by large-scale institutions and enterprises that operate on the basis of logics which aim at reproducing similar type of political and economic controls that are present in the “old” media frameworks. Patelis (2000, 90) refers to “virtual-communication essentialism”, that is, a “tendency to describe and analyse the Internet in a historical, institutional and above all economic vacuum”, without the realization that there are material constraints and socio-economic power structures that limit its empowering and demassifying features. This pertains to such issues as inequalities in access and to material advantages possessed by powerful corporations in the development of online content and the very infrastructure of the internet (ibid., 91–92). One example that illustrates this well is the fact that even though users are, in principle, free to go wherever they want in cyberspace or to participate in various “social media” activities, in practice well-known commercial portal sites structure their on-line experiences in ways that serve the instrumental needs of those who provide these sites as well as those who advertise there. Because of the necessarily limited amount of time that people have on-line, such portals answer to real resource-based needs. Furthermore, the media industries which dominated the global media sphere before the internet continue to be powerful both off- and online (Freedman 2006). In the age of the internet, the “old” is still resilient, “in the shape of corporations, voices, brands and economic imperatives that dominate offline”. They are “just as likely to affect the ‘new’ as the ‘new’ is likely to make life difficult for the ‘old’” (ibid., 288).

The reason why I want to take these reservations on board is that I do not think that we can dispense with traditional approaches to media when dealing with certain (and in my mind crucial) aspects of this “new media” environment. The research on the internet resonates with former analyses of the media (see Dahlberg 2004), even though there are features in the internet that call for analytical re-thinking (e.g. Lister et al. 2003, 9–37). However, to claim that these new features compel us to develop whole new theories would be a case of technological idealism, which assumes that the qualities of those technologies alone determine the adequate approach.<sup>1</sup> Looking at

1 An extreme example of such idealism is Mulder's (2006) handling of “media” in the “New Encyclopedia Project” special number of *Theory, Culture & Society*, whose editors consider globalization and digitalization as the most important two keywords of our time. For Mulder (ibid., 296), “the language of new media is written not in words or pictures but in zeros and ones. Looking around the computer's digital universe, one sees hardware, software, networks, objects, environments, situations and spaces, but no media – for everything there communicates, and when everything is a means of communication, the word ‘medium’ loses its explanatory power.” This argument seems to assume that our “computer age” (ibid.) is a wholly different stage in human history that has no relation to what preceded it. I am sceptical of the claim that words and pictures have no part in the “language” of digital media. The statement makes sense only if one assumes that “media” is reducible to technologies,

the history of media research, one can easily see that each new generation of electronic media has impacted on the field, but that the questions that have been asked about their role for culture, society, economy and democracy are based on theories and conceptions that have a long history.

### 3.2 The Theoretical Plurality of Media Research

Important though such technological changes may be in many ways, I want to repeat that the academic study of media is not reducible to the examination of its technological forms. It is also the study of media organizations, products, audiences and cultural reception processes, as well as the overall social relations within which they are embedded and which the media helps to reproduce. Because of this broad range, media research and theory is intermixed with other disciplines. For example, the analysis of media production is related to economics and political science; textual analysis of media products is informed by literature, psychoanalytic theory and semiotics; and the examination of the reception of media content is indebted to social psychology, anthropology and sociology, among others. These linkages relate to a long-standing debate inside media research, namely, the question of whether it could ever become an independent discipline with its own methods, theories and focuses or whether it is destined to remain a field where disparate interests are expressed, but without the emergence of a grand theoretical hard core that would give coherence to the whole enterprise.

In a sense this debate may be a little outdated by now, due to forces that extend beyond media research or media theory, narrowly defined. As Douglas Kellner (1995, 20) has pointed out, starting from the 1960s a proliferation of new theoretical discourses took place in Western academia in the study of society and culture, resulting in feverish “theory wars” (expressive also of more wide-ranging “culture wars”) between several competing positions. Most of these new theoretical discourses were related to the so-called poststructural or postmodern turn in theory that “affirmed otherness and difference, and the importance of attending to marginalized, minority, and oppositional groups and voices previously excluded from the cultural dialogue” (ibid., 24). Feminist theories arose around the same time, and they were joined by queer theory, studies of the “postcolonial subject” as well as other studies examining the construction of identity in terms of race, ethnicity and culture. By the 1980s, these new discourses had produced “ever-spiralling and complexified theoretical discourses” that cross-fertilized with each other but also offered new interpretations and critiques of such pre-existing fields as Marxism and psychoanalysis (ibid., 23).

All of these endeavours have affected the academic study of media as well. In 1993, the editors of *Journal of Communication* noted – in a volume that was dedicated to a debate concerning the “the future of the field” – that instead of the search for a universal paradigm, theoretical pluralism is the order of the day also in media research (Lévy and

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and nothing else. Mulder makes extensive use of McLuhan, who was also known for making bold statements regarding the radical newness of electronic media technologies (see section 3.5).

Gurevitch 1993, 4). In other words, we do not have to concern ourselves with a unified “media theory” (if this ever was a possible goal).

Yet this pluralization does not mean that we could approach the field as a completely unstructured intellectual playground. As in the scientific debate over globalization, we can discern certain well-entrenched paradigms in media research and theorization. The relationships and patterns of dominance between different currents of thought regarding the media are necessarily historical; they are reflective of general trends and tensions in social and cultural theory, and ultimately of the course of events in the social world itself. While some research questions have been bypassed or have become antiquated, the history of media theorization is not one of linear development: “Old debates over objects and research strategies considered long since resolved or dated suddenly reappear, calling into question modes of intelligibility and ‘regimes of truth’ that have held sway for decades” (Mattelart and Mattelart 1998, 2). As I will show in later parts of this study, many re-appearances are visible also in current perspectives on media and communications provided by globalization theorists.

A comprehensive account of media research paradigms would have to take note of the history and origins of the field and build up a delineation of current main lines in media theory on the basis of that narrative (see e.g. Pietilä 2005). This would not be of help here, since not all past and present media research paradigms are equally significant for academic debates on globalization. Instead of such a broad historical perspective, I will therefore offer an audit of those approaches that have the most discernible linkages to current academic discussions of media and globalization.

Three media research traditions stand out as the most important ones in relation to the topic of globalization (in no specific order): 1) the political economy of the media, 2) cultural studies and 3) medium theory. This grouping does not merely identify those approaches to media that are important for the study of globalization, but also points to the general development of media research over the past couple of decades. The first approach is concerned with a critical analysis of media institutions, structures and their logics, whereas the second one has concentrated on the analysis of cultural meanings and their complex constructions (on the textual level or by looking at the processes of reception and identity-making). The existing disagreements between these approaches (see Ferguson and Golding 1997; Peck 2006) are crucial for the ways in which many media scholars have built up their own perspectives. The political economy of the media and cultural studies are significant orientations in academic media research; the friction between them is existent also in the debate over media and globalization (e.g. Flew 2007, 30). In addition to these two, a third perspective must also be included, namely, medium theory of mainly North American origin. This perspective is a fairly long-standing media research tradition in its own right, but what has made it fashionable again is the perceived importance of the internet and other digital media, as well as the support that it has gained from the rise of postmodern theory and “information society” thinking in the academy.

As Stevenson (1995, 181) points out in his roughly similar delineation of what constitute the main interest areas of media research, “any comprehensive approach to mass communication cannot ignore any of the three paradigms evident in the literature”,



since they “capture some of the most important aspects of media”. Historically speaking, all of these paradigms emerged as important approaches to media approximately in the 1960s and 1970s, and all of them must be assessed as a reaction and response to the American empirical media sociology tradition – i.e., Mass Communication Research – that had dominated the field up until that time (Gitlin 1995). Naturally, the distinctions between different theoretical perspectives are not clear, as they contain also unifying features. But although such features exist, and even if different researchers do not fall neatly into different categories, their theoretical differences and identifications are important for the way in which scientific discourse works.

In what follows, I will go through the central characteristics of the political economy of the media, cultural studies and medium theory and connect these traditions to the problematic of globalization. My review is informed by the idea that all strong paradigms in media research are outcomes of decades of theoretical formulation, empirical research and debate (some of which is more internal to one paradigm, and some of which has been conducted in relation to other paradigms). The development of ideas that are particular to each media research paradigm is only understandable through the prism of intellectual history and the evolution of ideas. The dimension of history is of relevance also in terms of how the current links between media and globalization have been forged. It must be kept in mind that the interest that globalization theorists have for the media (and media researchers for globalization) has not taken place on an empty terrain. Monge (1998, 142) notes that globalization “is not a new topic for communication scholars” who have studied “phenomena that are intimately related to globalization” even before the term became popular. For instance, much work done in media research since the 1970s has concentrated on the debate over cultural imperialism, which must be seen as a key debate leading to positions taken by current cultural globalization theorists.

In line with the overall goals of this study, my account differs somewhat from an established procedure whereby the history of media and globalization debate is presented via references to three main phases of international communication research: 1) the dominance of modernization theory or “communication and development” paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s; 2) the challenge of cultural or media imperialism between the late 1960s and early 1980s; and 3) the critique of cultural imperialism and the rise of “global cultural pluralism” from the 1980s onwards (e.g. Sreberny–Mohammadi 1996, 179–181; Mody and Lee 2002; Rantanen 2005a, 1–3, 74; Sparks 2007, 3–4). These paradigmatic changes are important for the present topic and I will discuss them in the following sections. However, the approaches to media that come up in three-part periodization do not provide, by themselves, an adequate background for my exploration of globalization theory. For one thing, modernization theory seems to have quite a limited appeal today in academic circles, at least in the form in which it was developed in the 1950s and 1960s in international communication research.<sup>2</sup> For

<sup>2</sup> The modernization paradigm in international communication was mainly of American origin, expressing the idea that the United States’ technologically advanced media system, and the market-friendly values upon which it was built, offered the model with which developing countries could extricate themselves from their backward traditions and replace them with a set of modern attitudes (openness to change, yearning for a better life, etc.). The paradigm had a liberal-democratic dimension but also a more conservative, anti-communist aspect that was closely associated with

another, the above periodization does not register the impact of medium theory for academic globalization theory. Generally speaking, I am not interested merely in the ways in which exponents of different media research schools have produced analyses of “phenomena that are intimately related to globalization”; I am also interested in the theoretical foundations and motivations that lie behind the political economy of the media, cultural studies and medium theory, since they have been evoked in recent academic discussions of globalization and media. Thus, I will next elucidate each different paradigm’s general features and also those dimensions by which they are connected to globalization theorizations more directly.

### 3.3 The Political Economy of the Media

The political economy of the media has its roots in Western moral philosophy and Marxism. According to Vincent Mosco (1996, 25), political economy is “the study of *the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources*”. The media is one such resource; consequently, it must be viewed “as integral to fundamental economic, political, social, and cultural processes in society” (ibid., 71). The word “process” is central here, since political economy, as a general historical study of society, is interested in analyzing changes in the social whole. Traditionally, this was part of the attempt by political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo or, from a perspective that was critical of them, by Karl Marx, to comprehend the shift from agricultural societies to manufacturing or industrial capitalist societies. In later historical contexts, political economists following Marxist ideas have theorized dynamic transformations of capitalism, noting a shift from “liberal” to “monopoly” capitalism (Baran and Sweezy 1966) or from fordist to post-fordist capitalism (Harvey 1990). Despite these

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the interests of the U.S. government and its cold-war policy of “containment”. In the last couple of decades, references to western superiority in the manner of the leading modernizers such as Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm, Ithiel de Sola Pool or Everett Rogers have become increasingly rare. There are media researchers who have continued to underwrite the basic tenets of modernization theory and its view of cultural development, but generally in a much more cautious tone (see e.g. Demers 1999). Only American think-tank scholars like David Rothkopf (2000) – of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, closely associated with the U.S. Department of State – have had the temerity to lecture on the benevolence of the export of American culture to the rest of the world, on the grounds that “of all the nations in the history of the world, [the United States] is the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future” (ibid., 450). Such outspoken post-cold war triumphalism is a rarity nowadays in academia, in particular due to the damage that two consecutive Republican administrations did to the global image of the United States in the 2000s. Nonetheless, the “traditional” modernization paradigm has not become extinct; while its standing has weakened, it continues to influence, in a modified form, media development policies, especially in the field of health communication (Leye 2007, 987–988; Sparks 2007, 50–55). It is also interesting to hypothesize that while the original, western-centric forms of modernization theory à la Schramm or Sola Pool have become subdued, modernization theory as a more general mode of thinking may not have. For instance, while Appadurai (1996, 9) is explicit in denying the methodological and ethical salience of the modernization theory that makes a strong link between positive development and strong nation state guidance, he relies strongly on the argument that electronic media technologies are central, as they open up the consciousness of the traditional, local or nation-bound person towards the global modernity of broadening mental horizons, social and cultural change, innovation, mobility, and perhaps even more democratic participation. Crucially, he holds that this is a positive development. This constitutes, in a sense, a model of progress from tradition to modernity, which is of course what modernization theory in general is about.

transformations, however, the social totality in question also has relatively enduring features, and it is these to which critical political economists have directed most of their interest, i.e., to the social structures, logics and power relations that are peculiar to capitalism (Garnham 1990, 7; Calabrese 2004, 2).

As representatives of one variant of such thinking, political economists of the media have been interested in how the capitalist economic system influences media industries and activities. Accordingly, such issues as the growth of the media industry, the extension of its corporate reach and the privatization, commodification and commercialization of the media – as well as the social, political and cultural consequences of these economic developments – have been crucial for this orientation (Boyd-Barrett 1995). Besides economic structures and dynamics, political economists have also been interested in the political sphere: in the nature and ramifications of state regulation and intervention in the field of media. While the political economy of the media has tended to focus on structural issues and on the dynamics of media production, this does not necessarily preclude the analysis of media texts and audiences; yet it should be emphasized that such analysis is not the main area of political economy. In general, political economists of the media argue against abstracting textual meanings and reception processes from wider social structures (e.g. Golding and Murdock 1996, 24–29; Garnham 2000, 109–139). This reflects what Mosco (1996, 71) has noted as the avoidance of “communication essentialism” or the effort to “decenter the media” within the field; that is, the claim by political economists that the media should always be studied as part of a larger social totality.

As I have already indicated, a key feature in the political economy of the media tradition is that its exponents have criticized prevailing media structures and politics. This characterizes the work of seminal political economists, such as Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller in North America and Peter Golding, Graham Murdock and Nicholas Garnham in the Great Britain, as well as the work done by younger generations of researchers across the world.<sup>3</sup> It is not so that all political economic analysis of the media is by its nature critical in its goals, since some researchers who are discussed under the rubric have produced works that are much more descriptive than radical in their nature. Typically, however, political economists stress that the media must not be approached as examples of neutral social communication. Golding and Murdock (1996, 14) note that “critical political economy starts with sets of social relations and the play of power”. It is thus distinguished from mainstream economics, which “focuses

3 The political economy of media tradition is not uniform. This is particularly noticeable if we compare the American political economy of media (e.g., the work of Schiller, Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky and Robert McChesney) to its British counterpart. The former is not anchored in Marxist theory – or social theoretical discussion at large – as closely as the latter. Another distinction lies in the different political and media-structural contexts of the United States versus Great Britain, which has had an impact on research goals. British political economists often find the North American political economy of media mechanistic. Thus, Hesmondhalgh (2007, 35–37), for instance, distinguishes “the Schiller-McChesney tradition” from (mainly Western-European) “cultural industries approach”, which he sees as offering a more accurate picture of the logics and contradictions of cultural production. This is a justified claim, but I am less convinced that the American political economy of media emphasizes “concerted strategy” (*ibid.*, 35) in a deterministic way, at least without strong qualifications; see, for example, an exceptional treatment (Klaehn 2002) of the nuances of “propaganda model” by Herman and Chomsky (1994), often misrepresented in academic commentaries. However, it is certainly true that the North American political economy tradition has its limits.

on the sovereign individuals of capitalism". The production and consumption of media is "structured by unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources" (ibid.). The media are made up of institutions and institutional relations that work mainly for corporate and class power, both domestically and globally.

That the media and capitalism belong together like the mind and body is merely a starting point for the political economy of the media, since this interrelationship can be approached from a variety of perspectives and analyzed at various levels and in different domains. In a seminal article, Garnham (1979, 132) argued that under the structural constraints set by the capitalist mode of production, the media has two immediate functions: a) it consists of commercial organizations that take part in commodity production and distribution (thus, logics which are pertinent to any industry, such as division of labour, the need to conduct extensive marketing and the need to produce profits, are operative also in that area); and b) it assists "in the creation of surplus value within other sectors of commodity production" through advertising. The media industry is thus both generic and specific. The examination of the question of what kind of commodities the media industries produce is one of the most important concerns of all for this tradition. For instance, some political economists have made analytic distinctions between media products as "public goods" and material commodities (e.g. Garnham 2000, 57–58), while others have distinguished between different forms of media or cultural production (e.g. Miège 1987). The latter have emphasized the varying logics that guide different cultural industries (such as book publishing, newspapers and broadcasting), as against viewing them as forming a singular system as maintained by Adorno and Horkheimer (2002 [1947]) in their seminal essay on the "cultural industry".

It can be argued, as many critical political economists do, that the characteristics that distinguish different types of media industries from one another do not cancel the importance of those features which unite them. Such an argument is closely related to the crucial point made by Marx that has been recapitulated by critical political economists, namely, "the pressure to reduce everything to the equivalence of exchange value" (Garnham 1979, 133). What is common to all media industries, regardless of the type of commodity that they produce, is that they are businesses working on the basis of this "abstracting drive" (ibid.). Since the late nineteenth century, the media has increasingly come under the control of capitalist principles of accumulation and exchange. This has led to the creation of a more market-friendly media environment, one indication of which is the increase of advertising over time and the extensive commodification of media content.

But what is it that is being sold and exchanged in spatially expanding media markets? At the beginning of a notable debate within the political economy of the media, Smythe (1977) argued that the primary commodity of media is not information or entertainment but audiences whose attention is sold to advertisers. From this perspective, the ideological aspects of commodified media messages are not as important as the examination of the "work" that audiences conduct for the advertisers, by consuming those messages in their free time, free of charge. Smythe's position was original – it brought forward an important feature of media economy and pointed to an interesting case of exploitation outside wage labour – but it was also too restricting.

Golding and Murdock (1979, 210) rightly argue that Smythe reduced the media to its economic function, ignored its role “in reproducing ideologies, and consequently fail[ed] to explore the ways in which economic determinations shape the range and forms of media production and its resulting products”.

From a perspective that informs much critical political economic analysis, the relationship between media and social power is based on a set of economic determinants that lie behind the operation of media. The start up and maintenance of media and cultural industries require considerable investments in production technologies, facilities, raw materials and labour. While there are thousands of different media outlets in economically advanced countries, the most powerful and influential of them are owned by large concentrations of capital (media companies and media conglomerates, which can also be part of even bigger corporate conglomerates) or dependent on those in various ways (for instance, small local newspapers that have to rely on bigger companies or news agencies for much of their journalistic output). The inversion of this material fact is that social groups that are lacking in these economic resources are in a disadvantageous position to make their voices heard publicly. As a result, many political economists of the media have analyzed critically media concentration and its effects on democracy (e.g. Baker 2007).

The question of ownership relates intimately to the issue of class power that is central for the paradigm. While different media companies compete with each other in capitalist markets, they also have many mutual interests. They are involved in “alliance capitalism” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 176–177), they all have close ties to businesses in general (including banks in order to raise money for their productions or for their acquisitions), and, as any significant economic player in the context of the contemporary “quartal economy”, media companies are accountable to investors and shareholders whose primary focus is on the “bottom line”, i.e., the maximization of profit. All of these market-based dynamics and laws mean that privately owned media operations are strongly encouraged to promote the interests of the markets and the privileged social groups that control them. If the media organizations are not showing proper conformity with these interests, they are likely to be faced with a range of pressures on the part of corporate and financial elites (see e.g. Herman and Chomsky 1994, 5–12).

The ways in which structural determinations constrain media production in general terms is one thing, but it is quite another thing to show more precisely how these determinations are related to media content on a day-to-day basis and with what ideological consequences. This issue is the central bone of contention inside the political economy of the media and also in discussions where contending perspectives call the former into question. Here it must be noted that contrary to some criticisms, political economists are usually careful enough to note that there is no direct or mechanistic relation between economic determinations and the nature of cultural products, not to speak of their influence on consciousness. Instead, they approach the issue by discussing the limits set by political power and the logic of how the markets work.

The histories of advertising and marketing are a dramatic illustration of the ways in which capitalist economic considerations determine the range of media that are available in the first place. As British political economists James Curran and Jane Seaton

(1988) have shown, with the increasing power of private capital and advertising, mass circulation working class newspapers, which had emerged in England in the nineteenth century, were effectively undermined or put out of business altogether by the end of the century. The prime reason was that with rising advertising revenues, newspapers that attracted advertisers were able to lower their unit price, even clearly below the production costs. This put radical newspapers at a serious disadvantage, since their readership was not as desirable for the advertisers (who also mistrusted their politics). Among other things, it “forced radical newspapers to redefine their target audience, and this in turn caused them to moderate their radicalism in order to attract the readers that advertisers wanted to reach” (Curran 2002, 97; see also *ibid.*, 98–99). Similar constraints are in play today. For instance, while audience preferences are important considerations for current media companies, this does not mean that what is offered for popular consumption is always “popular” in any straightforward sense. Given that the advertisers and media companies have a huge economic interest in targeting the preferred audience demographics, productions that are not appreciated by desirable audience segments may be cancelled even though they are otherwise widely popular (Wayne 2003, 78).

As further effects of advertising, political economists of the media have noted the extensive commodification of media content, such as the trend towards the creation of commodity-driven sections in newspapers and magazines (entertainment, lifestyle, fashion, food and wine, etc.) or the practice of product placement in films and television. Besides analyzing the different effects of advertising on media and culture, political economists have also assessed other kinds of mechanisms that tie the production of media texts to dominant interests. In the production of news, the promotion of these interests occurs through the overwhelming preference of using dominant social groups from corporations and state institutions as sources. Corporate and state sources have massive advantages over resource-poor organizations in gaining media coverage for their views. The reasons for this are both institutional-professional – as these sources are considered as more “legitimate” – as well as economic, i.e., they have more capacity to produce information and orchestrate media campaigns on their own behalf (Goldsmiths Media Group 2000, 35–36). The domination by these sources has to be assessed in light of the fact that there are also countervailing tendencies at work. It is possible for non-official sources to gain positive access in the media, especially in times of elite dissensus over an issue of political importance. But all in all, this does not mean that source access is evenly distributed (*ibid.*, 28–30, 34).

Murdock (1982, 143) makes the general argument that in the conditions of advanced capitalism, the material that media industries “produce for mass consumption tend to support, or at least not to undermine, capitalism’s central values of private property, ‘free’ enterprise, and profit”. Even more pointedly, McChesney and Herman (1997, 140) claim that media texts are geared to express a “suitable program environment” which “does not challenge materialistic values and is not set in grim circumstances; it shows people who spend and gain status by acquisition and consumption”. Such views have been considered as too reductionist by opponents. For example, Thompson (1995, 171) states that in their “concern to highlight the connection between broadcasting media

and a capitalist system of commodity production and exchange”, political economists have “placed too much emphasis on the role of consumerist values and [have] neglected the enormous diversity of themes, images and representations which characterize the output of the media industries”.

These opposing statements are difficult to resolve because they refer to different evaluations – which are not only empirically but also theoretically based – concerning the question of what constitutes proper cultural diversity. We may argue, on the basis of critical political economic analysis, that market controls make it more likely than not that consumerist motivations are promoted in media products. But even if this proposition expresses an important aspect of the contemporary media landscape globally, it is, to be sure, a rather crude argument if left at that. Hesmondhalgh (2007) has evaluated this issue in relation to media entertainment. He points, in the first instance, to the overall increase in advertising and to the “huge increase in the amount of promotional material carried by the cultural industries in texts that we do not consider to be advertising” (ibid., 279). However, on the other hand, there are also contradictions at work. In commercial media systems they derive, importantly, “from the fact that cultural industry companies are happy enough to disseminate cynical or even angrily political works as long as they produce a profit (or else prestige that can be turned indirectly to profit)” (ibid., 283). Examples of these would be iconoclastic animation shows such as *The Simpsons* or *South Park*, whose relation to feel-good consumerism is strained to say the least. Overall, structural-economic imperatives do not translate in any direct sense into cultural forms and values. This opens up the possibility of using the media for other, politically more empowering ends inside systems that do not support such ambitions in general.

However, from the viewpoint of critical political economy, there are reasons to make a number of qualifications even after noting the contradictions that are at play in cultural production. For one thing, one should not celebrate the mere existence of “cynical or even angrily political works” in the media as sufficient proof that economic imperatives pushing towards the promotion of capitalist values are effectively bypassed. There is a tendency for political critique to become neutralized in contemporary capitalist societies because of the widespread presence of political cynicism (see Bewes 1997). A distinction should also be made between different types of critical material that is disseminated by the media. While many media texts may critically target various kinds of retrograde values (sexism, racism, homophobia, corrosive individualism etc.) this does not mean that criticism of overall social relations deriving from the necessities of “the market” has much room in the media. Such material does appear in commercial media, but it can be said to appear not because but despite the system:

“Media content which criticises business, which investigates corporate culpability in environmental issues, Third World activities, safety for workers, or even tough-minded consumer affairs programmes are unwelcome as far as advertisers are concerned. [...] Of course, this is not to say that you cannot find such content in the media, but there are economic



limits as to how much media material perceived as detrimental to the advertisers can be accommodated". (Wayne 2003, 84)

These kinds of arguments take distance, in particular, from liberal-functionalist analysis of the media according to which media institutions are autonomous organizations that offer publicity to various competing interests, check the abuses of power and inform public debate on important issues from an independent, professional perspective. In contrast, political economists view the media, first and foremost, as organizations that legitimize and reproduce the social systems and hierarchies of which they are a part. All in all, critical political economy of the media is characterized by a strong emancipatory stance towards social and cultural analysis. Researchers working inside the tradition have highlighted deficiencies in the way in which the media works as an important social institution. In particular, they have called into question the capacity of commercially operated media to serve and to uphold a democratic public sphere. In a stream of studies, political economists have pointed out that the media jar with their own principles: they do not grant equal access to different social groups, they serve special interests rather than the common good and they define their audiences more as consumers than as citizens who deserve to be properly informed about both material and cultural issues that affect their lives. According to McChesney (1999), economically rich media produces "poor democracy"; this situation can only be remedied through fundamental structural reforms or at least via strengthening of public intervention.

In addition to the analysis of the influence of the capitalist mode of production on the media or the increasing commodification of media content, critical political economists have discussed many structural trends that have emerged in the global media sphere in tandem with the rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s. One of them is the concentration of ownership and the growth in size of media corporations, resulting in the formation of media oligopolies globally, regionally and nationally. Corporate concentration in the media industries is a long-standing phenomenon, but it has accelerated since the 1980s. The form that it has taken recently is captured by the notion of media conglomeration. In general, media firms want to maximize economies of scale. This can be done by engaging in acquisitions in certain sector of media production (which is called horizontal integration, such as when a book publisher buys another one) or by extending their operations so that they may cover the whole "chain" from production to distribution (i.e., vertical integration, the basic logic of which is to help in the rationalization of production and sales). Large media companies have also engaged in ownership diversification, which means that they have acquired a range of related media industries (newspapers, television stations, software producers, music publishers, internet portals etc., or even leisure operations like theme parks). Naturally, these developments are not simple and uniform; for instance, media firms can sell their assets off if they find that they have bought operations that do not support their overall strategies (for other qualifications, see Hesmondhalgh 2007, 170ff).

There are several reasons for corporate concentration and conglomeration, but they all come down to the economic "bottom line".<sup>4</sup> As for the consequences, they are hotly

4 First, because of the unpredictability of demand for cultural products, it makes sense to own a large "catalogue" of them (and this can be made possible through acquisitions). Second, developments in



discussed and debated also within the political economy of the media. From a critical perspective, it is of concern when huge resources are gathered in so few hands, for this affects the overall conditions of the public sphere. For quite obvious and logical reasons, the owners who are in leading positions in media conglomerates are typically dedicated to right-wing politics and values, which they promote via their outlets. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, the host of Fox News Channel, is a case in point (see e.g. Curran 2002, 230). Yet critical political-economic analysis is not essentially about individual personalities and their political outlooks. It is about structural aspects and developments of the media and their consequences. Viewed in this way, the point made by political economists with regard to media conglomeration is that this process has given more political leverage to private media industries and privileged elites that control them: in other words, social groups that are essentially interested in making profits and upholding the unequal social relations that make this possible (e.g. Bagdikian 2004, 19–21, 28–29).

Aside from these grand political considerations, more culturally oriented concerns have been raised as well. Political economists have examined the ways in which media conglomeration affects the cultural diversity of media texts. From a critical political economy viewpoint, the commercial strategic tendency towards synergist corporate promotion reduces the diversity and quality of cultural goods, because media texts “often promote other texts produced by the same cultural industry company” and “companies increasingly plan and design texts in order to encourage subsidiary, spin-off texts, often of low quality” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 279; see also Golding and Murdock 1996, 20). In this way, the process is intertwined with the formation of a full-blown “promotional culture” (Wernick 1991).

Overall, however, the influence of media conglomeration on media content and culture is a disputed issue, and there are good reasons to avoid getting mired in it to a great extent. In a sense, it makes no difference if commercial media production is dominated by twenty or two media companies: the same goal of targeting large and primarily affluent audiences, predominantly by dint of entertainment, remains operative in both cases. The argument against corporate conglomeration as such may then be more liberal than radical in its politics. Garnham (2004b, 100) claims that left-leaning political economic analysis has focused on this development too much, missing the point that the media are “the products of economies of scale and scope and thus

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media technology (the digital convergence of communications) have meant that “the boundaries that have separated different communication sectors [...] are being rubbed away” (Golding and Murdock 1996, 20). Therefore, it is useful to control various parts of the so-called multimedia market where media products are nowadays consumed. Third, via conglomerate control, media companies try to achieve “synergy” advantages. Because of the nature of cultural production of symbolic content, similar types of material can be circulated in different media outlets owned by the same company. This brings with it not only cost savings, but also provides opportunities for cross-promotion of brands. Finally, one must also note the tectonic change that have taken place in the political-economic landscape since the early 1970s. Because of the beginning of “long downturn” (Brenner 1998) in advanced capitalist countries at the time – which has naturally affected the world economy at large – new corporate strategies were needed in order to reverse the tide of declining profits. Thus, corporate planners were forced to come up with new ideas of marketing and product innovation. These were realized, for instance, by the emerging media conglomerates and their “flexible” and cross-diversified business strategies. None of this would have happened, of course, without the global neoliberalization movement, which decimated many of the regulatory barriers that would have otherwise obstructed the waves of media conglomeration and commercialization.

are by their very nature concentrated". Yet one really cannot avoid the question of the concentration of media industries and their expansion, especially when we assess the economic and cultural development of the global media sphere.

For obvious reasons, the issue of media conglomeration has been a pressing concern for American political-economists; in comparison, their counterparts in Britain, in particular, have traditionally been more interested in debating the merits and developments of public broadcasting in connection with developments in commercial media markets. For them, the importance of the system of public service broadcasting is founded on the idea that the media should serve social and cultural goals that are different from merely commercial objectives. Whatever actual problems there are in the implementation of the public service model, the crucial thing is that it "tries to develop in its practice a set of social relations which are distinctly political rather than economic" (Garnham 1995a, 245). This ideal expresses the aspirations of a wide array of social forces that share an interest in upholding the principle of public service broadcasting and public good in the face of political, cultural and economic challenges that have arisen in the last couple of decades (Raboy 1996, 2–3).

These challenges are manifold but they, too, are connected to the emergence of neoliberalism and the shift in the role of the state from the Keynesian welfare state model towards the "competition state" model (Cerny 2000). According to this model, the primary function of the state is to help to open up new markets for corporations, to assist them in international competition and to create a more favourable climate for investment and capital accumulation. In fairly similar terms, the 1980s saw the withdrawal of the state from broadcasting in many countries (the dismantling of state monopolies and the creation of a more commercialized media sphere). A commercial media model – based on principles that are the most refined in the United States – has become the evolutionary standard throughout the world. The removal of state broadcasting monopolies was compatible with the overall neoliberal strategy, but the needs of market forces have remained unmet ever since. What these forces advocate is a kind of "night watchman" version of public broadcasting, according to which public broadcasters should only provide media content that is commercially unprofitable and which serves special audiences who lie outside the interests of capital. Concurrently, subsidies to public service broadcasters are considered as potential instances of "government failure". As a result, new ideas of the future of communication have emerged. A leading one of them is the aim to re-cast the principle of "universal provision" of public service in a wholly different light, so that it becomes inseparable from consumption of commercial media products based on individual "choice", a notion that is very much mistrusted in critical political economy for several reasons (see Curran 2002, 227–231). What they typically argue for is the renewal of state regulation of the media in a more publicly accountable sense, that is, so that it acts as a corrective for the market-based corruptions that can damage media democracy and diversity if left unchecked.

While political economists agree on the fact that media systems have been commercialized globally and that this has affected the current status of public service media, they are divided on the issue of whether public service broadcasting has plunged

into a truly deep crisis. Curran (2002, 188) argues that the story of public service broadcasting is not one of remorseless “decline and fall”. Against these “alarmist” notions, he argues that public service broadcasting is “is still well entrenched” and “remains the dominant force shaping the broadcast output in Western Europe”, valued for its independence and program quality in the eyes of the public (*ibid.*, 191, 192). Despite these provisos, Richeri (2003) is right to point out that a combination of factors – including rising costs of production, transition to digital services, competition from commercial channels, fragmentation of audiences and political pressures – has contributed to the marginalization of public service broadcasting in Europe. In relation to this theme, it must be noted that public service broadcasting is indeed far from being a universal phenomenon. In most third world countries, it remains a “distant ideal, not a working reality” (Raboy 1996, 2). In the former second world, “a lack of social embeddedness” of public service broadcasting deprives “it of its natural social habitat and cultural context” (Jakubowicz 2004, 65). It also needs to be kept in mind that especially in authoritarian state contexts, public media have acted more like sycophantic mouthpieces of governmental power, instead of serving democratic ideals (Curran 2002, 222).

Another complicated issue that offers challenges to public service broadcasting is the question of its relationship to nation states and national identity. In light of the tenets of current cultural globalization theory (Chapter 6), public service broadcasting is problematic because historically it was founded on a vision of a unified national community. Thus public service broadcasting, in terms of how its role was traditionally conceived, is threatened with becoming a relic in the culturally heterogeneous and globalizing societies of contemporary times (see Jauert and Lowe 2005). Yet it can be argued that public service broadcasting is not intrinsically controlled by such nation state homogeneity. Murdock (2005) turns the argument around by noting that what makes public service broadcasting important today is the fact that it still provides a vision of a common political arena that is relatively independent of both the state and the market: “In a world increasingly divided by ethnic, national and religious fundamentalism promoting uncrossable lines between ‘them’ and ‘us’ [...] and united only by consumerism and the superficial and disposable communalities of shared style, fostering a sense of citizenship that is cosmopolitan, values diversity and committed to addressing problems through deliberation rather than force, is more vital than ever” (*ibid.*, 229). This remains the promise of public broadcasting in the age of cultural globalization and the internet.

Political economists of the media have also examined recently other motifs, such as the nature of cultural work (as opposed to other types of labour) and the impact of new digital technologies on media economy and policy. I will touch on some of these issues in subsequent Chapters, insofar as they are pertinent to the globalization theorists whose work I will discuss. I have offered the above review of the political economy of the media in order to identify some of its main interest areas. These are important in their own right, but also in an additional sense: the issues which I have presented in above – the economic logic and structure of media industries, the commercialization of media systems across the world and the critique of media centrism by political economists,

i.e., the tendency to isolate media from wider social structures and power relations – are missing in the accounts made by mainstream academic globalization theorists. They thus constitute an important foundation from which I will make my own critical remarks. Finally, the general theoretical ideas of the political economy of the media are also foundational for the topic of cultural or media imperialism, which I will deal with next (the topic will be treated at greater length in Chapter 6).

### Cultural and Media Imperialism

One important precursor to current globalization research was the field of “international communication”, which emerged in the 1960s. In the early stages, it was dominated by American modernization researchers (such as Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Ithiel de Sola Pool), who viewed international communication through the prism of “communication and development”.<sup>5</sup> The central problematic for this perspective was the question of how developing countries with their traditional social forms and customs could achieve the transition to modernity. The answer given by the above-mentioned researchers was that this can be done by installing modern, Western-style mass communication systems in the South. They are the instruments that promote new ideas, attitudes and values that are supportive of change and which are indispensable for the rise of political and economic activities that lie behind the evolution towards capitalist liberal democracies.

The modernization school was challenged in the late 1960s and 1970s especially by Latin and North American scholars who based their own views on Marxist or neo-Marxist theories of imperialism and world system. According to a key dependency theorist, Andre Gunder Frank (1969), development was in no way a neutral process, since it was founded on legacies of colonialism and emerging forms of Western domination. More specifically, development was founded on unequal trade relations and flows of resources that benefited Northern or Western nations and their transnational corporations. Development on such unilateral terms did not lead to social progress but, instead, to the strengthening of patterns of domination that forced “peripheral” nations onto the path of “dependent development”, or even worse, of “development of underdevelopment”, as the process meant that they did not gain control of their own resources.

Dependency theory was closely connected to political economic critique of cultural aspects of Western domination. The term cultural imperialism – or its close relative, media imperialism – are blankets for a host of studies associated especially with the political economy of the media of North-American, Western European and Latin American variety. A sizable portion of past and present commentary on cultural imperialism theory revolves around the works of the late Herbert Schiller. His first major study on the subject, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, was published in 1969. The paradigm then became established in earnest in the next decade through the publication of works such as Wells (1972), Nordenstreng and Varis (1974),

5 See essays by above-mentioned authors collected in Pye 1963. See also footnote 2 (pages 57–58) above.

Schiller (1976), Tunstall (1977), Boyd-Barrett (1977), Beltrán (1978) and Mattelart (1979). The 1980s already marked a loss of momentum for the theory of cultural imperialism, although studies that addressed international communication through the lenses provided by the paradigm kept on appearing (e.g. Smith 1980; McPhail 1981; Hamelink 1983; Jayaweera 1986). Towards the end of that decade, it became increasingly improbable to find definitions of the media “as an ideological-industrial complex devoted to the justification and perpetuation of the capitalist system, and in particular, the North American financial-political-military complex that constitutes the core of yankee imperialism”, as in the words of Cuban writer Acosta (1979, 141). Such a formulation, published in the first volume of *Communication and Class Struggle* (Mattelart and Siegelaub 1979), seems hopelessly out of place in the current intellectual configuration.

Yet if the cruder versions of the paradigm are now growing dusty in university libraries, the tradition itself has not vanished altogether. The concepts of cultural imperialism and media imperialism have been authoritatively defined by Schiller (1976) and Boyd-Barrett (1977). If we sum up the essentials of their definitions,<sup>6</sup> they reveal a number of points that have been repeated in other instances as well. The cultural or media imperialism paradigm emphasizes: a) the division of the world system into dominating core and dominated peripheral countries; b) the pressure exercised by the core countries on modelling the media structures of other countries in ways which benefits the former; c) the imbalance or non-reciprocity of flows of media products between the North and the South; and d) the threat posed to indigenous local cultures because of the relationship of dependency that exists between the core and the periphery. Generally speaking, members of the paradigm argue that the age of imperialism is by no means over (Schiller 1969, 16); it is only that the forms of imperial relationships have changed. The dominated countries are no longer directly ruled by foreign powers via the direct use of military force or colonial measures of economic exploitation. Instead, they are ruled indirectly through neo-colonial methods of economic and cultural domination. The exploitation of the resources of post-colonial countries by multinational corporations counts as an example of such new forms of domination, together with the installation of Western-style commercial media systems and Western media hardware in the periphery – or the export of media products from the core to the periphery. In the latter case, according to the paradigm, export does not refer merely to un-equal economic exchanges, but to the export of Western consumerist and individualistic ideology which has, again, “deleterious effects” on the norms and values of local cultures (Lee 1988, 74).

These are the main constituents of the cultural or media imperialism position in its original form. Out of this perspective emerged empirical studies on the dominance and

<sup>6</sup> According to Schiller (1976, 9), “the concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is *attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed* into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the value and structures of the dominating center of the system”. Boyd-Barrett (1977, 117) used the more narrow concept of “media imperialism”, which he defined as “the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries, without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected” (see also *ibid.*, 119).

influence of US media exports (films, television, comics, advertising etc.) in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere (see Thussu 2000, 63) and also more practical policy propositions demanding more equality in international media exchange. Critical political economists of the media were working hard for the UNESCO-based call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s (see Golding and Harris 1997). NWICO reflected the wishes of African, Asian and Latin American leaders who demanded the “reduction of the monopoly power of existing transnational media” (Schiller 1989, 297) and more equality in international media exchanges. These calls were voiced in the somewhat vaguely humanistic language of the report of MacBride Commission (UNESCO 1980, 259), which recommended “national cultural policies which should foster cultural identity and creativity, and involve the media in these tasks”, instead of leaving the matter to the hands of the global market. The principal target of this debate – as was the case elsewhere in discourses of cultural imperialism – was the United States with its transnational media corporations, television exports and global advertising efforts. The idea of international media reform along these lines was not met with applause in the core of the world system, as is well known.<sup>7</sup> The waves raised by the NWICO-initiative have calmed. They seem to belong to a different period of time when the idea of regulation of media markets was centrally present in international cultural-political forums. That vision is no longer considered practicable, as we now “see the era of multilevel governance of the media system – the interplay between many different actors, public and private, on multiple levels, from the local to the global” which leave no room for “top-down steering and regulations [...] of the sort envisaged in the 1970s” (Carlsson 2003, 34). The reason for this situation is, in a word, “globalization”, which has in many ways replaced the previous keywords in international or global media research (*ibid.*, 27–28). Yet it would be wrong not to mention that a new debate centred around the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has continued to raise the same kind of issues of equity that were taken up in the NWICO initiative, although without the same level of political controversy (Mansell and Nordenstreng 2006).

The cultural imperialism paradigm is not quite the monolith it is often claimed to be. For example, Boyd-Barrett and Tunstall refrained, already then, from associating global cultural domination with the United States with the same kind of reductive vehemence as Schiller. Tunstall (1977, 137–231) acknowledged that the post–1945 period was an era of “American media conquest” around the world, but he also detailed the histories of media empires of Britain and France in their former colonies and noted the status of Mexico, Egypt and India as strong regional media exporters (*ibid.*, 62, 95–124, 248–261). Furthermore, his early work is permeated by the realization that the dominance of US-based products in global media markets was subject to erosion, as local media industries in the semi-peripheries and in the Third World were taking off in earnest (*ibid.*, 40–42; see Garnham 2004a, 180). Later, when Schiller’s (1966) original idea that “America rules the airwaves” became more untenable, he corrected his position by

<sup>7</sup> In many Western countries, it was felt that the NWICO-movement was not directed against the United States exclusively but that it was an attack against transnational capitalism itself. As a countermove, the United States and United Kingdom cancelled their UNESCO memberships in 1984 (rejoining only in 1997 and 2003, respectively), and other Western states were also upset of what they perceived as a threat to their economic interests (Roach 1997).

noting that the “early formulation of [...] the cultural domination thesis occurred in a specific historic era” and that the “difference today is that national (largely American) media-cultural power has been largely (though not fully) subordinated to transnational corporate authority” (Schiller 1991, 13).

Tunstall’s work was also much more ambiguous than Schiller’s in making claims about the systemic character of mass media as tools of capitalist domination – not surprisingly, it drew criticism from Smythe (1979) for this. Tunstall made some perceptive predictions concerning the future trends of international communication, predictions that resonate with current cultural globalization theory. He argued, first, that the media sphere of each country outside the core would be split between strong Anglo-American flavours, popular especially among the urban and the affluent, and the expansion of “the local, the ethnic and the traditional” (Tunstall 1977, 274). Furthermore, he claimed that “there must also be a middle level”, which “will almost certainly be hybrid”:

“It is these hybrid media which may have the biggest growth. They will be on the pattern of the Indian, Hong-Kong, Egyptian or Mexican film industries (and their numerous would-be imitators) and the Zambian or Thai versions of ‘country and western’ or the Brazilian or Argentinian telenovela. Of these media it will become more and more difficult to deny that there is a local authentic element (since media imitations so quickly become local traditions) but it will be equally difficult to deny that these hybrid forms are linked to the international media”. (Ibid.)

In this citation, Tunstall prefigures a paradigm shift in the study of international communication, with a language that is expressive of the interests of current cultural globalization theorists (Chapter 6) who have elaborated arguments regarding similar cultural complexities.

Since the early 1980s, many researchers have adduced serious shortcomings in the perspective of culture imperialism. In line with a widely held consensus, Thompson (1995, 173) argues that the theory of cultural imperialism is an “ultimately unsatisfactory” position that can only be used as a negative point of comparison, against which new perspectives may demonstrate their superiority. However, the paradigm is not completely without support and there are signs that the confidence with which it was condemned has deteriorated more recently. Against the common critical perception, Boyd-Barrett (1998), van Elteren (2003) and Chalaby (2006), among others, have attempted to redefine the notion of cultural or media imperialism. Also Morley (2006) goes against the grain with his reconsideration of the merits of cultural imperialism theory. He not only notes that current academic discussions of cultural globalization are rooted in debates about cultural imperialism but, furthermore, that these critical positions offer important questions that are “still lurking, and still unanswered” in those discussions. Morley claims that we must realize that despite all the talk concerning the novelty of globalization, today we actually confront “old questions in new guises”. Although certainly not a whole-hearted advocate of the cultural imperialism perspective, Morley



suggests that a serious engagement with the issue of cultural imperialism is useful in the current context: it offers a necessary counterpoint for cultural globalization theory, which suffers from historical amnesia and an uncritical understanding of global cultural power relations (Ibid., 30). What makes Morley's commentary interesting, besides his arguments, is that he is a notable representative of cultural studies within which the notion of cultural imperialism is more often than not dismissed.

### 3.4 Cultural Studies: from Cultural Materialism to Poststructuralism

According to one of its numerous critics, the formerly prominent position of cultural imperialism invested too much in the examination of political and economic power and ignored the fact that culture "is subservient neither to the state, nor to the market. It is an active player in the process" (Lee 2000, 196). This comment highlights a shift of emphasis in international communication research that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. It is also indicative of frictions between cultural studies and political economy, which have often been considered as rival perspectives in media research. Despite their differences and the (infamous) debates that these have sparked (most notably Grossberg 1995 and Garnham 1995b), these two central strands of media research and theory also have mutual interests. In particular, they share Marxist inheritances, although it is exactly these shared intellectual impulses – or, more precisely, the question of how they should be interpreted – that have become the central dividing issue between the two approaches. Besides offering a point of reference for such debates, these inheritances have been important for the internal development of cultural studies as well. That is to say, representatives of cultural studies have diverged in terms of how much they have wanted to take Marxist materialist thought on board, if at all.

Today, cultural studies is an international academic colossus by any measure. It has grown from a "radical minority intervention" into "a new general formula for work across the entire range of what, for convenience, we may call the human sciences" (Mulhern 1997, 43). Besides its phenomenal success worldwide, cultural studies is renowned for its "infinite plasticity" (Ferguson and Golding 1997, xiii). The orientation is highly diverse theoretically, described by one of its representatives as "a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge; codify it and you might halt its reactions" (Johnson 1986, 38). As an approach, cultural studies has opened up a way of analyzing subjectivity, identity, politics, ethnicity, race, generation, gender, nationality, sexuality, technology, history, media and everyday culture, in a manner that seems to pose no limit to what can be chosen as research subjects (Rojek 2007, 7). For Appadurai (1996, 51), who envisions cultural studies as "cosmopolitan ethnography", its subject matter "could roughly be taken as the relationship between the word and the world [...] so that *word* can encompass all forms of textualized expression and *world* can mean anything from the means of production and the organization of life-worlds to the globalized relations of cultural reproduction". Such extreme open-endedness is not merely positive, for it can also be viewed as damaging "eclecticism" that "betokens not strength but a problem", namely a lack of core to its research programme (MacLennan



and Thomas 2003, 161). In any case, the remarkable diversity of cultural studies means that it is hard to describe, body and soul, the different aspects of that which constitutes its research imagination.

However, we can make sense of the approach by discussing some its main intellectual currents in a historical frame. In the following discussion, I am concerned, besides relating those currents to media research and theory, to delineate a particularly important intellectual trajectory within cultural studies, namely, an increasing willingness to discard the above-mentioned historical-materialist considerations in favour of a very different view of power in social and cultural relations. The outline of this trajectory is of specific use for the comprehension of the positions that cultural globalization theorists have taken with regard to media and communications, which will be examined in Chapter 6.

The origins of cultural studies lie in British literary studies and academic Marxism. As an orientation, it began to form in the 1950s and early 1960s on the basis of the works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Edward P. Thompson. These academics wanted to shift the centre of gravity of cultural critique away from the British humanist tradition that was associated, in particular, with the literary critics Matthew Arnold and Frank R. Leavis. The cultural elitism of this tradition, which dates back to the late nineteenth century, was called into question by Hoggart, Thompson and Williams. They considered culture as a matter everyday lived experiences rather than as canonical works of art that were supposed to represent the highest standards of aesthetic achievement posed against industrial “mass civilization”. The second major motivation of these authors was the attempt to link cultural analysis to progressive socialist politics, and with it, to formulate a positive rather than negative appraisal of working-class culture. This came forward in Hoggart’s (1957) concern for the corrosion of a distinctively proletarian way of life because of the rise of mass produced entertainment, in Thompson’s (1963) history of the formation of working class consciousness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England and in Williams’s (1958, 332ff) discussion of how the working-class based “idea of solidarity” offered the basis for a future democratic society with a “living culture”.

Instead of referring to the early works of Hoggart, Thompson and Williams simply as “culturalism” – as Stuart Hall (1980a) does in his famous essay on the two paradigms of cultural studies – it is more accurate to speak of them as instances of “left culturalism” (Milner 1994, 44–45). While Williams’ key concept of “structure of feeling” referred, in part, to “the culture of a period” shared by a given generation, he stressed at the same time that culture cannot be analyzed without taking into account class differences and class power. This is evident in his discussion of the concept of a “selective tradition”, for example (Williams 1961, 49ff). However, if the political and moral conservatism of earlier British literary humanism was one line from which Hoggart, Thompson and Williams took explicit distance, the other was an economically reductionist understanding of culture within Communist Marxism. For Williams, the meaning and value of works of art and ideas could never be determined by “a social explanation” alone, i.e., so that they were seen as instruments in the service of class dominance, and little else (Williams 1961, 45). Williams was a particularly important source of

theoretical inspiration for the research that began in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in the mid-1960s.

An anthropological emphasis on everyday lived experiences as the meaning of culture and an engagement with Marxism – in a way which took notice of the importance of class for cultural analysis but which was cognizant of the dangers of economic determinism – formed the two main elements of Williams' analyses from the 1960s onwards. There were changes in his theoretical approach, however. What Hall has called the "experiential pull" (Hall 1980a, 63) in Williams's early work opened it up to criticism on the part of Eagleton (1976, 25–33), who found Williams guilty of producing an "over-subjectivist" and romantic account of working-class subjectivity, without realizing the extent to which human creativity and his quest towards a "common culture" was undermined by the structures of advanced capitalism. Similarly, although less aggressively, Hall (1980a, 64) noted that Williams (together with Thompson) ultimately read "structures and relations downwards from the vantage point of how they are 'lived'", a view that Hall thought was too voluntarist. In retrospect, such criticisms "tended to maximize the continuity between [Williams' early work] and the antecedent lineage of English cultural criticism and to minimize the continuity with a Marxism that Williams [...] was rediscovering in new or unsuspected forms" (Mulhern 2009, 31). This remark refers to Williams's later work, which was characterized by an increasing interest in Marxism, especially Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and the development of a "cultural materialist" perspective.

In developing his theory of cultural materialism, Williams attacked what he saw as a false model present in orthodox Marxism, that is, the suggestion that culture was to be treated as a "superstructural" reflection of the economic "base". On the other hand, he wanted to correct the equally problematic notion that culture was only a matter of consciousness that evolved in autonomy of specific material conditions. For Williams (1977, 90–94; see also Eagleton 1989, 168–169), it is wrong to think of the economic sphere as "real" and "material" and culture as somehow less real and immaterial. Instead of making such distinctions, he emphasized that we should "see language and signification as indissoluble elements of the material social process itself, involved all the time both in production and reproduction" (Williams 1977, 99). Culture, or communication, was thus not a secondary affair but an essential part of how a political and social order is formed.<sup>8</sup>

In approaching the question of how cultural processes are related to political rule, Williams (1977) made extensive use of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The fruitfulness of "hegemony" consisted for him in the way that it "goes beyond 'culture',

8 The question of whether Williams's "cultural materialism" is in fact as far removed from the base/superstructure model as he thought is a complex theoretical issue, the further analysis of which would not serve the goals of this study. I want to note, however, Eagleton's (1989) critique of Williams's "cultural materialism" in this regard. Although generally sympathetic towards Williams's later work, Eagleton (*ibid.*, 174) argues that we can think as "superstructural" those institutions and practices, including cultural ones, which act "in some way as a support to the exploitative or oppressive nature of social relations". Of course, not all cultural activities are "superstructural" in this sense but if "you come, for example, to read a literary text for symptoms of its collusion in class power, as Williams has also many times perceptively done, then you are treating it 'superstructurally'" (*ibid.*, 174). In other words, cultural materialism is not incommensurable with a historically materialist conceptualization of the base/superstructure model, provided that such a model is properly formulated, i.e. not too mechanistically.

as previously defined in its insistence on relating the ‘whole’ social process to specific distributions of power and influence” (ibid., 108). Hegemony goes also beyond “ideology”, since it “is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values” (ibid., 109). In this way, Williams used Gramsci to re-organize and fuse together – with an eye towards the analysis of advanced capitalist societies – the two central elements of his work: “a culturalist sense of wholeness of culture” and a “Marxist sense of the interestedness of ideology” (Milner 1994, 52). In his later work, Williams was following Gramsci also in his insistence that while hegemony as a kind of “culture” works for class domination and subordination, it is not a static state of affairs and it does not go uncontested. Every hegemonic formation “has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” as it is “challenged by pressures not all its own” (Williams 1977, 112). Politically, the development of such counterhegemonic pressures was crucial for the “mature” Williams, who remained a committed Marxist. Writing of changes in structures of feeling, as new kinds of active social experiences challenge the old, he was showing support for “the necessary economic struggle of the organized working class” that needed to be accompanied by “the most sustained kinds of intellectual and education work” in a fight against “the system of meanings and values of capitalism [that] has to be defeated in general and in detail” (Williams 1975, 241).<sup>9</sup>

Many of Williams’ political and theoretical aspirations were carried on in Hall’s theoretical essays in the 1970s and after. Though critical of Williams’ culturalist emphases, Hall has made many similar theoretical arguments in his work. For instance, he reacted against “vulgar” Marxism in much the same way as did Williams, advocating the use of the concept of hegemony which refers to “the (temporary) mastery of a particular theatre of struggle” and which “rids Gramsci’s thinking of any trace of necessitarian logic” (Hall 1980b, 36). In contrast to Williams, however, Hall credited the work of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser as an important theoretical influence, together with Ferdinand Saussure’s and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s analyses of language and culture. What Hall took from these French structuralists was offered in opposition to Williams: “Whereas, in ‘culturalism’, experience was the ground – the terrain of ‘the lived’ – where consciousness and conditions intersected, structuralism insisted that ‘experience’ could not, by definition, be the ground of anything, since one could only ‘live’ and experience one’s conditions *in and through* the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture” (Hall 1980a, 66). Taking his cue from Althusser, Hall stressed the naturalized sense of ideological domination that takes hold of subjects as part of their everyday realities, unconsciously rather than through direct manipulation. As a downside, he (1980a, 69) pointed out that Althusser’s theory of ideology was limiting because it did not give adequate attention to social struggles which, in turn, necessitated an engagement with the theory of hegemony. Yet Hall (ibid., 65–66) praised Althusser for the fact that he directed attention to the ideological formation

9 Compare this with Tony Bennett’s (1992, 406) neoliberally re-structured concept of “useful culture”, according to which “cultural studies might envisage its role as consisting in the training of cultural technicians: that is, of intellectual workers less committed to cultural critique as an instrument for changing consciousness than to modifying the functioning of culture by means of technical adjustments to its governmental deployment”.

of subjects in capitalist societies, a process which is tied to discursive positions and representations through which they understand the world around them.

Media institutions are essential for the creation and circulation of such discursive positions. Research concerning the ways in which the media produce ideologically motivated representations became a major undertaking for the CCCS (Hall 1980d, 117), analyzed from a perspective that merged ideology theory with linguistic and semiotic approaches (Rehmann 2007, 226). In contrast to political economists, Hall and his colleagues did not focus on the economic structures of the media as the main area of critical interest (Pietilä 2005, 240), as they considered that this would push the ideological-cultural aspect of the media to the sidelines. However, as is evident in Hall's groundbreaking encoding/decoding model of media, social and economic relations were conceived by him as foundational for both media production and consumption, unlike in positivistic media research where they were isolated from the larger social totality (Hall 1980c, 130). Hall emphasized that the processes of how actual media texts are produced is based not only on political-economic structures but on "meaning structures" or codes which are adopted by people at a very early age and which have become so naturalized that their ideological aspects easily go unnoticed (*ibid.*, 132). This creates a strong impression that the media are merely depicting the world as it is, so to speak, which is of course highly problematic, since media representations of "the real" actually tend to serve "the given dispositions of class, power and authority" (Hall 1982, 63).

The media is thus conceived as a key hegemonic apparatus in modern capitalist societies. While Hall (1980c, 134–138) hypothesized that media texts such as television news could be read in various ways, he also maintained that they typically contain ideologically motivated "preferred meanings" which set limits to audience interpretations. Preferred meanings can be resisted but they are dominant, since they "have the whole social order embedded in them" and have very effectively become parts of the common sense (*ibid.*, 134). The question of how much power audiences have in relation to media texts and ideological meanings is an issue that has been much debated within cultural studies more recently, leading to many interesting but also doubtful directions in its media research. Hall argued that media texts are never constituted by signs that serve the dominant political order in a straightforward sense, because their connotations are always negotiable, at least to some extent. Nonetheless, Hall (*ibid.*) warned that "polysemy must not [...] be confused with pluralism".

One important theme that Hall (1983) analyzed from such a theoretical perspective was the question of why Thatcherism became such a powerful political force in the United Kingdom. Hall believed that this was not due to the operations of "false consciousness", but rather, to the fact that Thatcherism was capable of mobilizing the contradictions of social-democratic corporatism in a way that served the interest of the emerging neoliberal order, global in scope today. Heeding the concept of "articulation" that is at the centre of his understanding of ideology, Hall (1983, 27–31) noted that concepts like "freedom", "people", "state" or "nation" have no "fixed class meaning" but could, instead, be re-articulated so that they constructed much of the working-class constituency, and the population at large, "into a populist political subject" (*ibid.*, 30) that is supportive of

the new power bloc. Especially through public hegemonic strategies such as the claim that there is no difference between the interests of the working class and corporations – as they are both parts of the common “we”, i.e., nation – and by constantly conjuring up a distinction between “the people” (freedom) and the “statism” (un-freedom) of Keynesian social democracy, Thatcherism was capable of launching a popular attack against British labourism. Hall emphasized that the resulting “authoritarian populism” (ibid., 22; Hall 1980e) had a real foundation in the collectivism and bureaucratic nature of the social-democratic welfare state; thus the ascendant neoliberals were all the more capable of making it into an enemy of “the people” and neutralizing whatever protests the grand political shift to the right was bound to raise.

The response that Hall received regarding his analysis of Thatcherism is interesting in itself but more so here in relation to the ways in which cultural studies has developed politically and theoretically since the 1980s. Many critics (e.g. Jessop et al. 1984) have accused him of producing an overtly ideological analysis of Thatcherism-cum-neoliberalism – even a celebration of it – which exaggerates its potency in organizing popular sentiments. To some, it is indicative of a larger regression within cultural studies into a “textualist” understanding of culture and politics, a move away from class struggle and “the classic Marxist problematic of demonstrating the priority of the economic within the social totality” (Sparks 1989, 86; see also Milner 2002, 118).

Such criticisms are problematic in their own ways, but it cannot be denied that Hall’s later writings have much in common with postmodern theory, such as his preoccupation with the logic of discourses and the attendant analysis of how identities are formed. Hall (1996b, 5–6) defines identities, following Laclau and others, as constituted through difference, and as “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us”. Yet while such a formulation comes dangerously close to a postmodern conception of identity that is problematic (see e.g. Craib 1998, 7–9), Hall cannot be assessed as an unquestioning champion of postmodern theory. He has taken distance from it, calling into question perspectives which propose “total free floatingness of all ideological elements and discourses” and which are unaware of “material constraints of any kind other than that provided by the discursive operations themselves” (Hall 1986, 40; see also Hall and Grossberg 1986). While Hall can be criticized for not focusing enough on the analysis of developments in real social-material conditions, he does not claim that they are of no consequence for how identities are constructed or that we should discard the critique of capitalism and class power (Davis 2004, 161ff). What binds many of Hall’s analyses to Williams’s cultural materialism – however differently they may have analyzed the reasons behind the rise of Thatcherism, for example (see Milner 2002, 116–117) – is that both of them have dealt with cultural practices through which oppressive class relations and capitalist hegemony is maintained, and the question of how that hegemony could be properly resisted.

Keeping in mind these different, but also contradictory, influences in Hall’s work, I think it is misleading to claim squarely that he “presided” over a general “postmodernisation’ of British Cultural Studies” (Milner 2002, 118). Yet without assessing the specific influence of Hall, it is certainly true that such a trend has been

powerfully present within cultural studies in general and that this has resulted in the weakening of its former critical-political edge. There are several manifestations of this trend. One of them is identified by McGuigan (1992) as “cultural populism”, which involves a “positive relationship between intellectuals and popular culture” and an “appreciative, non-judgemental attitude to ordinary tastes and pleasures” (ibid., 4). These attitudes carry on the anti-elitist stance which has characterized cultural studies throughout its history, but they also represent “an uncritical populist drift” (ibid., 5) within the paradigm.<sup>10</sup> The axiomatic target of this critique is the work of John Fiske, dating back to the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Much of the criticism that Fiske has received is fully deserved, although one may question the extent to which such critique serves to damage cultural studies as a whole (see e.g. Mulhern 2000, 140–141). What has been the most unconvincing aspect of Fiske’s reasoning is that he has been keen to view all kinds of popular-cultural practices as politically progressive, such as consumption of tabloid press or ironic readings of television serials. Claiming jauntily that “the textual struggle for meaning is the precise equivalent of the social struggle for power”, Fiske is confident that audiences emerge victorious in the struggle, since whatever hegemonic blocs “the people” are up against, audiences “still manage to make their own meanings” with what is being provided for them (Fiske 1986, 302; Fiske 1987, 286). The lesson of this variant of cultural studies is that while tendencies towards the ideological reproduction of social power do exist in the media and popular culture, they are secondary to the empowering features of these forms – i.e. their “semiotic excess” – and the related signifying practices of audiences; thus popular culture “is formed always in reaction to, and never as part of, the forces of domination” (Fiske 1989, 43). Here, cultural studies has, contrary to Hall’s warnings (above), confused polysemy with pluralism and forgot the socio-economic and cultural constraints within which audiences work.

It is no wonder that many cultural studies researchers have been dismissive of “Fiske’s lapses into romanticism” (Morley 1998, 491). His work is populist and relativist in a double sense: through the fact that it cuts loose media texts and the contexts of their interpretation from their material-social determinants, it remains uncritical of both social power and popular cultural practices, which are deemed by him as *prima facie* politically subversive. Thus, even un-democratic tendencies among the so-called common people or their habitual media consumption practices can be valorized as politically resistant by the populist-postmodernist wing of cultural studies, which is by no means limited to Fiske’s work (see McLaughlin 1999, 335–338; Philo and Miller 2001, 55–59; McGuigan 1992, 72, 126–127).

Interestingly, another kind of “cultural populism” has emerged more recently, one that is critical of the idea of popular semiotic resistance. For those advocating “postmodern” audience ethnography in cultural studies, the truth of Fiske’s position

10 It has been suggested that the critical project of cultural studies was diluted when it became institutionalized in the United States in the 1980s, a country whose intellectual life is characterized by the lack of strong Marxist tradition and neglect of class analysis (see e.g. Ferguson and Golding 1997, xvi; McLaughlin 2002, 35). However, there are also slightly different versions of the story, such as McLaughlin’s (ibid.) argument that “cultural studies’s populist inclination was not created but intensified through the export of British cultural studies into [the] American context”, i.e., British cultural studies had taken distance from its original “Marxist analysis of class structures” even before its “export”, in ways which served a turn towards uncritical populism.

is in that it does not treat popular culture as a form of regression. Nonetheless, they have called into question the tendency of finding considerable political motivations in media consumption, whether this comes forward in optimistic or pessimistic terms. Drawing especially from the work of Clifford and Marcus (1986), postmodern audience ethnographers (e.g. Ang 1996, 98–108; Saukko 2003, 44–51) have been wary of “ventriloquism” in academic writing, that is, the practice whereby researchers analyze the interpretations of people on the basis of their own theoretical view of domination and resistance. Thus they claim to be more in line with the actual lived realities of audiences and especially the pleasures that they derive from the media. Promoting the perspective, Saukko (*ibid.*, 50ff) writes that resistance is a highly contingent issue. This is because – as one has learned from the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) – there are different forms of power and resistance that are expressed in particular areas of social and cultural life. The study of popular cultural reception should always be context-sensitive, never assuming in advance which analytic categories of domination are the most essential ones. Furthermore, “resistance may, or may not, challenge cultural, racial, sexual or economic inequalities, or all four of them” (Saukko 2003, 53). Instead of making strong structural-materialist assumptions concerning the political implications of cultural meaning-making, or even the very existence of any specific politics therein, the researcher should above all practice constant self-reflection of his/her “situatedness”, so that the voice of the Other can be heard and discharged from the “social baggage that hinders our comprehension of different experiences” (*ibid.*, 57).

Several objections can be raised against these arguments. New audience ethnography has been criticized on the grounds that it is too much concerned with the issue of representation and the situatedness of the researcher. Questions that are frequently posed in postmodern ethnography – such as who speaks? or who writes? – are not without value, but “they are not the only, or indeed, necessarily the most important, questions” (Morley 1997, 130). What they seem to raise is a problem of falling into a “paralysing (if vertiginously thrilling) trance of ‘epistemological nervousness’” (*ibid.*, 136). This is connected to what McLennan (2002, 639) calls “a distinctly *anti*-sociological flavour” in postmodern cultural studies. The theoretical conclusions that we can find in this orientation are typically such that “media consumption should be conceptualised as an ever-proliferating set of heterogenous and dispersed, intersecting and contradicting cultural practices, involving an indefinite number of multiply positioned subjects” (Ang and Hermes 1996, 340). Such extremely vague conclusions indicate the extent to which postmodern cultural studies is committed to *description* (see McLennan 2002, 635–636) of all kinds of particularities which do not cohere, however evocatively presented, into a complex social whole. This “consistent particularism” (Ang and Hermes 1996, 342) is logically cumbersome – as we “can never actually know when any particular is particular enough” (McLennan 1996, 70) – but in addition to that, it leaves us without any sense of sociological generalization and understanding of social determination of cultural practices. As this happens, we have also no sense of *explanation*, in other words, “the lessening of overwhelming surface complexity through use of a theoretical ‘key’ which brings to light selected, but central, generative processes” (McLennan 2002, 642).



To be frank, I think that the claim by postmodern audience ethnographers that they are more attentive than previous generations of scholars to the real experiences of “the people” largely expresses a desire rather than reality, whatever their good intentions. If we scratch beneath the surface, this cultural populist attitude reveals its origins in the long-lived romantic-intellectual trope of Dionysian forces (somatic pleasures, desire, authenticity, etc.), which are “constantly welling up from below to undermine the repressive, disciplining, dominating Apollonian forces of rationality and structure” (Garnham 2000, 128). Of course, repressive structures are not fun, but through the activation of this antipode, a curious inversion has occurred in postmodern cultural studies. Instead of criticizing the ways in which the media serves to legitimize central mechanisms of social inequality (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy, race-based discrimination), it launches energetic attacks on enlightenment theorists (Marxists, critical theorists, liberal sociologists, and even some former representatives of cultural studies) who in their mind cannot appreciate the full gamut of media-driven pleasure or the incredible multiplicity of identity positions. Thus those mechanisms of power are avoided in postmodern cultural studies, and anyone who points to their existence as part of explanation can be branded as an “elitist”. Yet the postmodernists’ rejection of enlightenment critique is based on the full arsenal of poststructuralist theory, which is hardly an authentic product of the life world of the common people. In fact, we may more convincingly claim that this rejection has arisen out of a marked historical-conjunctural shift, the effects of which can only be understood with precisely the kind of sociological generalization that is intentionally short-circuited in much contemporary cultural studies (see e.g. Eagleton 1997).

While postmodern cultural studies is “anti-sociological” in its avoidance of proper explanatory analysis, a mistake should not be made concerning its exact main opponent. It is academic Marxism, even while they still operate “within the space it opened” (Grossberg 1995, 77). Especially since the 1980s, cultural studies has moved from Marxist and neo-Marxist concerns to post-Marxist ones, as many of its representatives have adopted a distinctively poststructuralist framework. The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe is most influential in this sense, and indicative of wider tendencies. Their ideas on hegemony, discourse and articulation have been incorporated into cultural studies as criticisms of what has been perceived as the damaging essentialism, universalism and economic reductionism of Marxist theory.

In their discussion of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 85–88, 159–171) disconnect hegemonic strategies from class domination. Instead, they stress the existence of multiple points of power and antagonism, all of which are related to discursively formed constructions such as “society”, “class”, “race” or “women”. For Laclau and Mouffe, subjects are similarly permeated by many different discourses that allow them to voice their concerns in the first place. This breaks down the “naturalness” of forms of consciousness, which are in reality cross-cut by several bases for identity that are open, contingent and which can always be articulated anew in different contexts. Yet even with such poststructuralist emphases, it is not easy to define the extent to which Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theories should be defined as “post-Marxist”. While they are explicit in their criticisms of a “productivist logic” within Marxism (i.e., a mode of



analysis that does not pay enough attention to struggles over articulations), they want to uphold the concept of socialism and the necessity of getting rid of capitalism and its repressions – this time, however, on the basis of multiple subject positions rather than through a struggle with a unified working-class at the helm (see Best and Kellner 1991, 192ff). But they are also critical of radical poststructuralist theories that see societies as wholly indeterminate and constituted only of differences, introducing the concept of “nodal points” to refer to temporary fixing of identities without which coherent political identifications and politics itself would not be possible (ibid., 195; Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112).

In postmodern cultural studies, such qualifications give way to more straightforward interpretations. Within that orientation, Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theories are used in support of a radical cultural politics of difference, rather than socialism, and with it, as tools for purging whatever Marxist allegiances that remain in cultural studies. Thus, as Barker (2000, 82) sums up the lessons of Laclau and Mouffe for cultural studies, “radical politics cannot be premised on the domination of any particular political project (e.g. the proletariat of Marxism) but must be constructed in terms of the recognition of difference”. Here, difference is treated as an end in itself, and the resulting form of politics is founded on certain standard operating principles: the instability of meaning, the workings of power and resistance at the micro level, “the struggle over ‘naming’” and “a proliferation of new social antagonisms centred less in the workplace and more in the spaces of consumption, welfare and habitat” (ibid., 355–357).

The problem with this stance is that it “honors all manifestations of cultural difference as political, so encouraging particularisms and a narcissistic dissolution of politics in the necessary stricter sense” (Mulhern 1997, 48). Those who still adhere to the project of Enlightenment insist that emancipation is dependent on change of social structures that limit freedoms and cause misery, and whose removal would pave the way for a more just and humane society. This is, of course, something that is denied and even abhorred in much of contemporary cultural studies, where a more contingent form of political engagement reigns, coupled with an epistemologically distrustful attitude towards dealing with questions of truth, reason and power (Corner 1991, 269).

A typical mode of analysis with which non-desirable features in society and culture are attacked in contemporary cultural studies is a poststructuralist perspective that addresses “the power to name and represent the world, where language is constitutive of the world and a guide to action” (Barker 2000, 380). Informed by this perspective, researchers criticize hegemonic discursive practices, which they then attempt to unravel. When this is done from a radical anti-essentialist standpoint, which is fundamental for postmodern cultural studies, it leads to a very weak kind of politics. Thus, postmodern feminists, for instance, “suggest that equality of representation might be realized if we would only ‘speak’ differently of our subjects. Questions of material circumstances that undermine the conditions of possibility for political agency [...] are often noted but dropped from the analysis” (McLaughlin 1999, 343). The worst aspect of such radical anti-essentialism is, from the viewpoint of critical social theory, that it makes it impossible to have collective politics of any kind. In the by now orthodox logic of postmodern cultural studies argument, no attempt is made to connect politics of

representation to a collective social agent; indeed such a position is explicitly avoided, for it would be tantamount to an essentialist alignment with this or that form of social struggle. Because, in this view, the cultural identities of people are always unstable and ultimately fictional, such alignments will necessarily lead to totalistic discourses that attempt to fix identities. As Rehmann (2007, 13) points out, “the consequence of this one-sidedness is that postmodernism’s critical project of de-naturalization of fixed identities is always at risk of morphing into an overall de-materialization of social life”. What we are left dealing with is the constant de-fixing of meaning, endless disruption of identities and an infinite play with symbolic differences.

Due to this tendency, it is very hard to imagine how a necessary sense of collective destiny, solidarity and vision can emerge out of a postmodern politics, where “the notion of common good” is dissolved “in the acid bath of difference” (Murdock 1997, 92). In analytic terms, the problem lies in the way in which postmodern cultural theory becomes the description of particular connections that do not possess any logic of consistency. It notes shifting multiple relations between different elements, without trying to think what tendencies might lie at the heart of those complex processes (as these can never be known “in advance” and since there always are practically unlimited numbers of causal connections between unlimited numbers of structuring principles). McLennan (1996, 66–67) questions whether such contingency can be properly theorized at all.

*“Any theory which has interesting and bold things to say about social structure and social change must be essentialist; it will identify central concepts to ‘pick out’ purported key mechanisms and forces within a complex whole. Once again, if Marxism falls by the sword of anti-essentialism, then so do strong forms of feminist theorizing, Green theorizing and so on. Of course, ‘combined’ explanatory strategies are legitimate and perhaps promising, but it is clear from contemporary debates that no one is terribly happy about a simple ‘additive’ theorization of the various essential dimensions of social structure. The dimensions are usually thought to be in need of coherent interweaving and restatement as a new big picture – in effect, as a new complex essentialism.”*

Recognizing this, many researchers in cultural studies have taken distance from the poststructuralist or postmodern relativism that was discussed above. They have called for a recovery of those material, structural and institutional considerations that were important for the tradition in its earlier stages (see McLennan 2002, 632). One of the key effects of the postmodernization of cultural studies is an increasing indifference to the category of class (McLaughlin 1999, 341ff) and to the systemic features of capitalism in general. References to such entities as “social structures of inequality” (Saukko 2003, 58) are therefore often merely gestural in contemporary cultural studies, like weak parameters that generate precious little in the way of critical analysis. Very typical is the practice, noted also by Stuart Hall (1996a), whereby exponents of cultural studies automatically brand references to economic dynamics as part of the analysis of culture as “reductionism” (Murdock 1997, 100) and leave the issue at that.

Consequently, “it is difficult to find much explicit address of political-economic factors in much of the cultural studies literature other than invocations of the term ‘capitalism’” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 48).

The global order of capitalism is today more totalizing than ever. One can legitimately be sceptical about how this could be theorized from a perspective that is so deeply anti-essentialist, particularist and anti-totalizing in its claims. Moreover, it raises more than just an eyebrow to note how closely the postmodernization of cultural studies, together with the rise of cultural populism therein, occurred at the same time as the historical drive towards neoliberalism. The new subject of the globally triumphant capitalism is, on one hand, the ironic and active consumer who is “agile” in finding pleasures in his or her private life (Barfuss 2008). Due to this feature, one may call into question the amount of insight that can be derived from the dichotomy between audience passivity and activity that is still very often highlighted in cultural studies. On the other hand, the neoliberal subject is the flexible self with constantly shifting identifications, a mode of subjectivity favoured by global capitalism and its ever-accelerating cycles of production and consumption. This notion of the flexible subject also constitutes a powerful means of legitimation, since capitalism has become more tolerant of different identities (expressed in media representations such as advertising) and more ready to incorporate them into its workings, thus appearing more “open”. This qualifies much of the enthusiasm that one can find in the postmodern politics of difference. Noting that “critical energy has found a substitute outlet in fighting cultural differences which leave the basic homogeneity of capitalist world-system intact”, Žižek (1999, 218) relates this to “today’s critical theory”, which “in the guise of ‘cultural studies’, is performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible”. A major reason for this is the strong aversion that many exponents of cultural studies have to anything that smacks of essentialism or universalism.

It needs to be repeated that none of these features characterizes cultural studies in its entirety, although they have been powerful enough to have created much disillusionment within the paradigm (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 50). However, the point is that similar features are notable also in recent cultural globalization theory, which builds on similar poststructuralist notions of identity and power. I will begin my discussion of these linkages through an examination of how the international or global aspects of communication and media have been analyzed from the perspective of cultural studies.

#### Cultural studies and New Patterns in International Communication Research

The main theoretical tendencies in cultural studies have filtered substantially into the current academic studies on media and globalization, which should be juxtaposed with the history of “international communication”. As Rantanen (2005a, 93) observes, the third generation of international communication researchers and theorists – i.e., those coming after modernization and dependency theorists – “were not economists or political scientists, but anthropologists or scholars in the newly emerging field

of cultural studies". While those who proceed from the perspective of cultural studies in international communication are unified by their antagonistic attitude towards the notion of cultural imperialism and the strong interest that they have for symbolic interactions in and between different cultures, they may differ in terms of their theoretical emphases. The main dividing lines are drawn between a) those who approach the issue of international communication or media globalization from a traditional anthropological perspective which stresses the cultural values and identities that people have on the basis of their common cultural experiences and b) those who base their views on a more postmodern or poststructuralist conception of global cultural flows. Much of the important work in both of these realms has been published by Anglo-American researchers, but an important portion of it has been contributed by scholars from Latin America and elsewhere from outside of the Anglo-American centres of cultural studies.

According to the first group, which we could call the "culturalist" researchers of international communication, the global flows of media are bound up with the issue of cultural authenticity and regional, national or local identities. Here we can find studies that emphasize the fact that audiences everywhere prefer locally produced material that reflects their shared cultural values, traditions and beliefs. Such traits have been discussed extensively in many "peripheral" contexts and they have been applied both in the analysis of media production and consumption. Notions such as "cultural proximity" (Straubhaar 1991) and "localization" have been used to capture the importance of cultural difference in international communication. A widely researched example is the *telenovela*, the Latin American version of soap opera. It is a genre that enjoys popularity world-wide. It can be regarded a testbed for culturalist arguments if ever there was one, since this particular genre has been pregnant with charges of American cultural domination and the homogenization of content everywhere. Culturalist media researchers working against these connotations have argued that while influenced by US soap models, their Latin American versions reflect truly indigenous cultural features in their forms and storylines (see Biltereyst and Meers 2000, 396–397). The Columbian media researcher Jesus Martin-Barbero (1995) places *telenovelas* in the long tradition of local melodramas, which have preserved Latin American cultural imaginaries and reworked them in the context of national histories and the general process of modernization. In other words, Latin American television melodrama has been appreciated as a culturally authentic narrative forms which break "with the mimicry of western genre" (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996, 189).

Similar findings concerning local variations have been reported in studies of soap opera content throughout the world (Allen 1995; Tsai 2000). The importance of cultural proximity is not only supported by the study of locally produced media content in such regions as Asia or Latin America. It is strengthened also by the observation that transnational media corporations that have been eager to enter markets outside their home bases have been forced to regionalize or localize their media products to suit the cultural expectations of audiences: the need to adapt "their products and services to local cultural conditions [is] a commercial imperative" (Thussu 2000, 184). This imperative has characterized all sectors of the media industry. It has pushed for

publishing of regional or local editions of newspapers and magazines, regionalized advertising, the start-up of local versions of global television channels and the production of “indigenized” versions of globally popular television formats. This kind of modification of media content is important both for global media companies as well as national media companies throughout the world.

There is, then, a broad agreement, and not only among culturalist researchers of international communication, that localization and regionalization of media content has been increasing and that this has weakened the formerly overpowering status of Western media. Notwithstanding certain reservations, many studies from the past two decades suggest that media content is more representative of cultural variance, both due to the more prominent position of media companies of the developing countries in their respective markets, and thanks to the fact that many of them have also become significant international exporters. In 1990s at the latest, it had become evident that “new patterns” or “contraflows” had emerged in global television (Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham 1996). In part, this development is expressive of deep-rooted cultural needs. Sinclair (2000, 19) argues that the world-wide media sphere has divided into “geolinguistic regions” that are not necessarily defined by their “geographical contours, but more in a virtual sense, by commonalities of language and culture”. A clear example of this emerges, once again, from international studies of soap opera. One of the most celebrated cases of contraflow in worldwide media markets is the way in which TV Globo (Brazil) and Televisa (Mexico), two major media companies in Latin America, started to export their telenovelas extensively in the early 1980s. TV Globo, the most prominent of the two, sold and continues to sell its soaps primarily to other Latin American countries as well as to Portugal and Spain, which reflects the importance of cultural proximity as well as increasing South-to-South media traffic (Lopez 1995, 256–257; Biltereyst and Meers 2000, *passim*).

On the other hand, the notion of contraflow is not completely congruent with that of cultural proximity, for it also refers to increasingly culturally complex trends in international communication. Accordingly, the export of telenovelas has not been confined to countries with Latin cultural traditions. In the 1980s and 1990s, TV Globo’s programmes were heavily exported to such countries as France, Italy or China where they became successful; in 1999, as many as 130 countries imported media content from the Brazilian company (Thussu 2000, 215–217).<sup>11</sup> Together with the emergence of these countervailing trends in the world-wide flow of media products, there are also other

11 Testing this aspect of contraflow argument in the European context, Biltereyst and Meers (2000, 408) claim that in the middle of the 1990s, “the overall European pattern of telenovela imports [was] related to marginality, or even, in some parts of Europe, dehydration”. Besides “cultural distance” (*ibid.*, 405), the reason for this was somewhat similar to the dominance of US products in Latin American markets in earlier decades, namely, temporary media scarcity. That is, Latin American soap operas were relatively cheap and thus they were purchased by both Western and Eastern European media companies mainly in order to fill the slots opened by expanding broadcast time in the 1980s and 1990s, an advantage that was eroded, or that was expected to be eroded, once international competition increased (*ibid.*, 408–409). Reading the relevant research literature on *telenovelas* and comparing this to the enthusiasm of managers of Latin American media companies, one gets the impression that the argument concerning their popularity in areas beyond those that are “culturally proximate” is exaggerated. However, it is not to be doubted that telenovelas indeed have sizeable transnational audiences and that they represent as successfully exported media products also today (see Thussu 2006, 196–199).

and perhaps more substantial issues that qualify the idea that the global media sphere is patterned according to (geo-)cultural differences. Martin-Barbero (1995, 284) points out that the entrance of TV Globo's or Televisa's productions into the world audio-visual markets meant that "cultural difference" was deliberately dissolved "into cheap and profitable exoticism", so as to be more attractive to undifferentiated international audiences. Therefore, the cultural logic of contraflow is a contradictory one, a mix of local or regional cultural characteristics and their fusion with more universal idioms.

Despite the specific conclusions that different culturalist researchers of international communication have drawn in their studies, the theme of cultural authenticity is what has traditionally motivated their analysis. This theme cannot be separated from the question of cultural domination, which is another main motivation in culturalist studies of international communication. A key question posed by culturalist pluralists is the question of how much or to what extent different national media systems as well as the worldwide media sphere in its entirety exhibits originality and variety. The answer given is usually positive. The central argument that one can distil from the studies of "contraflows" and "cultural proximity" is the idea that because of the rise and strong presence of Southern media companies in world media markets, "non-Western cultures are more visible than ever before" (Thussu 2000, 223). Besides media production, the notion of cultural authenticity and domination has been researched and theorized in studies of media reception around the world. These studies generally agree that audiences everywhere have creative agency that seriously limits or even totally defeats the kind of "cultural invasion" from the outside that was feared by the earlier generation of critical communication scholars.

In the culturalist studies of both media production and consumption in the global level, the fundamental assumption is that culture and cultural preferences are powerful. Many things back up this claim. As noted, global media companies have to localize their products and the national media industries do the same by altering generic media formulas in ways that cohere with local needs, together with offering locally produced, culturally proximate television programs or films to their audiences. Naturally, this principle shines through most clearly in those parts of the world that have the required media infrastructures and sufficiently affluent audiences. But the same principle applies also in those countries that lack indigenous media industries, since in any case, so the argument goes, audiences – regardless of their material status – filter the media content through their own cultural structures. In short, cultural agency and imagination is a seemingly unailing resource, expressing itself in a myriad of ways.

In terms of the explanatory scheme that guides this kind of analysis of international communication, we can identify it with certain tendencies in cultural studies. Primary among these is the emphasis of the efficacy of cultural difference and the expressive-symbolic capacities of human beings everywhere. Culturalist researchers of international communication agree that the fear raised by critical political economists over the potential ideological impact of media exports from the North to the South does not carry much weight. Instead, emphasis is placed on the idea that ideological transmission is a much more uncertain affair. This is in tune with postmodern cultural studies arguments concerning audience activeness, which suggest that audiences resist foreign cultural

hegemony. Such arguments have followed closely the theoretical trajectory of cultural studies also in another sense. As was noted earlier, the study of economic structures and their impact on culture has increasingly been superseded within the field by an interest in the discursive construction of meaning. A proposition that is typically advanced in culturalist research of international communication is that the impact of capitalism on the meaning-endowed human action is not something that one should engage with too much. Instead, the culturalists emphasize cultural difference in their explanations (see e.g. Lee 2000, 193–194). For example, while Straubhaar (2000, 205) discusses the importance of class-based differences in assessing the global flows of television, he also argues that “audiences are divided even more by cultural capital than they are by economic capital”.

It is not that the question of domination (so important for cultural imperialism theorists) has been discarded here, but that it is considered primarily or even exclusively as a cultural issue. Culturalist researchers have argued that older models of cultural domination are defunct. “The old arguments based on Western media superiority and weekly developed systems in the South no longer work” (Sreberny 2005, 12). This claim is by now well established. However, a more complex picture has recently emerged, which goes more sharply beyond the former North-South model of cultural domination. Reflecting on these complexities, Sonwalkar (2001, 507) notes that the “source of domination is clearly not necessarily the North or West”, since “it can emanate from and within the South as well”. An example of this, which also illustrates the strengthening position of Southern media, is the dominance of Indian television throughout South Asia, which has triggered fears of “little cultural or media imperialism” in that regional context (ibid., 505). The complexities do not end there, however, as it is also possible for similar phenomena to occur inside multiethnic countries where the national can appear as the threat against the local, as for instance in India where “people in the south fear Hind-ization from the north” (ibid., 507; see also Ray and Jacka 1996, 86–87). Thus the theme of cultural difference cannot be reduced to the question of national differences or nation-state to nation-state relations, for there are many levels of culture and media and a myriad of possibilities for how patterns of domination may be formed in and between these levels. The examination of these patterns and their multiple contexts has generated much media research in recent times.<sup>12</sup>

Here we are beginning to approach a different kind of problematic and conception of culture and domination, which represents a shift from the culturalist study of

12 Speaking as important representatives of this trend in media analysis, Straubhaar (1997) and Sinclair (2000) see that the contemporary television flows originate from various sources at four different levels: local, national, regional and global. In such multi-level studies of contemporary media throughout the world, it is typically emphasized that local does not necessarily mean national, as there are media who cater for sub-national audiences (as was discussed in the case of India). The second level is represented by networked news and entertainment programs aimed at the national market, which remains important since the nation-state continues to be a frame of reference for many viewers, especially in ethnically homogenous countries. The regional level refers to television flows in markets that are larger than nations but not strictly world-wide, as was the case with the circulation of *telenovelas* in mainly Spanish-speaking regions. Then there are also the global media proper, such as CNN, who “take the same content to world-wide audiences” (Straubhaar 1997, 286). Further complicating the picture, Curtin (2003) – taking stock of Sassen’s (1991) notion of global cities – argues for the advance of the study of certain cities or “media capitals” (Bombay, Cairo, Hong Kong, Hollywood, Chicago) which serve international audiences as strong regional centres of media production.



international communication towards the analysis of media from a cultural globalization theory perspective proper. This perspective suggests that we have recently witnessed the emergence of entirely new kind of cultural patterns which de-stabilize former spatial arrangements. According to this view, it no longer makes sense to insist on speaking of inter-national communication, for such a perspective assumes that culture and nations go together, as it were. The new perspective does not stop here, however, for it also calls into question former understandings of cultural difference and power on a worldwide scale. While “cultural proximity” and “contraflow” are categories that serve to illuminate the complex character of global media traffic, they are, according to this type of analysis, still locked into a view that proposes equivalence between culturally authentic forms and geographic locations, a proposition that is claimed to be untenable in the age of extensive cultural globalization.

The new perspective goes beyond the idea that the relations of cultural flows and patterns of domination are complex in and across regions; it calls for a fundamental re-drawing of the analysis of global media sphere and argues for a perspective that pays attention to the blurring of what is local, national, regional or global in media production and consumption. In short, it introduces spatiality as a central category for media analysis, but, importantly, in a revised sense. According to this conception of new patterns in global media, spatiality stands not for cultural authenticity and locally shared belief-systems, but rather, for change, complexity, destabilization and difference; that is, the existence of multiple cultural imaginations that are not founded on tradition or a vision of common destiny, but on the idea that there are no natural or historically bounded limits to the ways in which cultural identity may be formed. In other words, here we have a poststructuralist analysis of media and globalization. In his sketch concerning “cultural studies in global terrain”, Appadurai (1996, 52) captures the fundamental task of such analysis: it “becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world?”

This poststructuralist strategy brings forth the central notions of globalization, deterritorialization and hybridization. It proceeds on the basis of the claim that entirely new kinds of cultural practices, expressions and identities are the order of the day. They are often considered as being loaded with political potential. Whereas in the culturalist view, the hierarchical relations of cultural domination so feared by critical political economists are overcome through, say, the strengthening of the local or the South, in the poststructuralist cultural studies perspective on globalization the same relations have become out-dated because of the “disjunctive global cultural flows [that] are characterizable less in terms of domination and more as forms of cultural hybridity” (Barker 2000, 117).

Much recent work in the study of global media and communication is informed by the idea that the single most important aspect of media products and media-related practices throughout the world is not be found by studying their origin or location but by concentrating on the existence of mediated flows that collapse their territorial fixity. Given its theoretical underpinnings, this kind of approach is bound to produce a picture of the world that is much more optimistic than the one painted by its chief opponent, which is, again, the theory of cultural imperialism. Chalaby (2005, 32) puts it thus:



“The transnational media order belongs to this emerging context, challenging boundaries, questioning the principle of territoriality and opening up ‘from within’ the national media. New media practices and flows are shaping media spaces with built-in transnational connectivity, creating contemporary cultures pregnant with new meanings and experiences.”

What I have delineated in the above are two interrelated but analytically distinct cultural studies approaches to the field of international or global media and communication research. Even as both of these approaches emphasize diversity, interconnectivity and change instead of hegemonic rule and economic structures, they differ from each other in terms of how much importance they place on notions of cultural authenticity versus cultural deterritorialization. While the cultural globalization theory paradigm – which stresses the concepts of deterritorialization and hybridization – today represents a powerful current of thinking, many researchers working within the broad confines of cultural studies are not willing to discard the anthropological conception of culture and cultural domination once and for all and replace it with a poststructuralist theory framework (e.g. Waisbord 1998). There exist certain contradictions between these positions, between cultural features that can still only be understood via reference to deeply entrenched local, national or regional belief systems and the postmodern notions of interconnectivity, hybridity and deterritorialization. Such poststructuralist conceptions of cultural globalization will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, in conjunction to John Tomlinson’s and Arjun Appadurai’s work, which bring forward its central features.

This section was concerned with the academic field of cultural studies, its theoretical development and its relationship to the study of media and globalization. My aim was to show how the essential theoretical positions and developments in cultural studies have been adopted and replicated in the way in which international communication or, more lately, media and cultural globalization have been studied. Next, I will conclude my review of the main theoretical roots of contemporary discussions of media and globalization by examining medium theory. Its status has increased recently due to changes related to so-called new information and communication technologies.

### 3.5 Medium Theory: in the Long Shadow of McLuhan

In his *The Assault on Reason* (2007), the former Vice President and current environmental activist Al Gore criticizes the decay of American political discourse, which he associates with the negative effects of television as a visual medium. Its cultural dominance has come to mean that the “inherent value of political propositions put forward by candidates is now largely irrelevant compared with the image-based advertising campaigns they use to shape the perceptions of voters” (ibid., 8). This remark is triggered by Gore’s own experiences in the 2000 U.S. presidential elections which he lost – ultimately due to Supreme Court decisions – to George W. Bush, who

managed to beat his opponent in spite of the former's obviously better grasp of political arguments. They also express Gore's long-term interest in such issues, including his 1969 senior thesis for Harvard University on "The Impact of Television on the Conduct of the Presidency", which was strongly influenced by Marshall McLuhan's medium philosophy (Bäuerlein 2001). While McLuhan's own view of television was in fact more positive rather than negative, Gore (2007, 20) echoes McLuhan's basic starting-points some 40 years later in claiming that "any new dominant communications medium leads to a new information ecology in society that inevitably changes the way ideas, feelings, wealth, power and influence are distributed – and the way collective decisions are made".

Gore is no medium theorist, but his observations fall into the parameters of the paradigm. For Joshua Meyrowitz (1994, 50, 51), a leading representative of medium theory today, it is a perspective which "focuses on the particular characteristics of each individual medium or of each particular type of media" and it considers media not as "simply channels for conveying information between two or more environments, but rather [as] shapers of new social environments themselves".<sup>13</sup> This definition is offered primarily as a challenge to American functionalist mass communication research, which is famous for its linear conception of communication as a process involving senders and receivers. While medium theory has never had the following of mass communication research and other rivalling perspectives, it has influenced academic and public thinking concerning media, increasingly so after the diffusion of the internet and other digital media in the 1990s.

Like the political economy of the media and cultural studies, medium theory is a fairly recent intellectual orientation. It was founded, above all, on McLuhan's work, most notably his *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964). The latter in particular had a major impact on intellectual discussions in North America (but also elsewhere) in the late 1960s and 1970s. McLuhan's fame extended beyond academia: he is in all probability the most widely-read media and communications theorist ever. McLuhan not only wrote about electronic media; he also appeared in it frequently – as a guest commentator in talk shows and in morning television, discussing, for instance, President Nixon's lack of charisma or the intricacies of the distinction between "hot" and "cool" media.

As a further example of McLuhan's popularity, he did a cameo-performance in one of Woody Allen's movies (*Annie Hall*, 1977). Yet a much more thought-provoking cinematic representation of him is the character of Professor Brian O'Blivion in *Videodrome* (1983), a sci-fi thriller directed by David Cronenberg who had attended McLuhan's lectures in the 1970s. In the movie, Professor O'Blivion is in touch with the world only through video recordings where he imparts such mcluhanesque revelations as "The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye" and thus "part of the physical structure of the brain". I do not refer to this only due to its value as an amusing intellectual anecdote. In regard to McLuhan's adoption by later generation of thinkers who are relevant for media theory, it is of importance that O'Blivion continues to say that

<sup>13</sup> Because of the claim that media is constitutive of the "environment" in which we live, affecting our senses and perception (and thus also "nature"), the perspective is sometimes named "media ecology"; see e.g. Postman 2008.

“whatever appears on the television screen emerges as a raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore television is reality and reality is less than television”. This is fully in line with Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, which is not coincidental: McLuhan’s influence on French postmodern theory was palpable and Baudrillard himself was fascinated with McLuhan (Huyssen 1989; Kellner 1989b, 66ff). Furthermore, the McLuhan-Baudrillard nexus guides Manuel Castells’s discussion of media and “the culture of real virtuality” (Chapter 4); it is also strongly present in Scott Lash’s recent work on “technological life forms” (Chapter 5).

McLuhan’s ideas on electronic media, provocative as they were, did not emerge out of thin air. They were based especially on the work of his fellow Canadian, economic historian Harold A. Innis, who published his last books, dealing with communication, in the early 1950s. McLuhan developed Innis’s work in his own highly problematic ways. In this study, it is not reasonable to cover the intellectual roots of medium theory in elaborate detail. The impact that the tradition has had on current discussions of media and globalization is largely due to the work of McLuhan and his disciples. However, in order to understand McLuhan’s own influential idiosyncrasies, it is necessary to compare his thoughts to Innis’s ideas on communication technologies, empires and cultural history.

In the introduction that McLuhan wrote to Innis’s *The Bias of Communication* (originally published in 1951), he attempted to situate it within a framework by which it was possible “to test the character of technology in the shaping of cultures” (McLuhan 1971, xi). This broad conception goes some way to identify McLuhan’s and Innis’s common points of interest, but it glances over their substantial differences. Because of his association to McLuhan, later commentary on Innis has subjected his work to much misrepresentation. It is unfortunate that Innis has been dubbed squarely as a technological determinist on par with McLuhan, since this is a very hasty reading of his work (see e.g. Blondheim 2003). One way to differentiate between Innis and McLuhan is to note that whereas the former was interested in how communication technologies affected social organization and power, the latter spoke of their impact on sensory organization and thought (Pietilä 2005, 60ff, basing this division on one of James Carey’s essays). Like McLuhan, Innis was indeed interested in communication technologies but he treated them always dialectically, as he “came to understand the bias of communication directly to affect, and be affected by, those interests engaged in the struggle to control force, knowledge and wealth” (Comor 2003, 94).

Despite this, there have been disputes over Innis’s legacy, centred precisely on the question of the degree he accorded to communication technologies’ transformative characteristics against the controlling interests of those who hold social power. Medium theorists argue that Innis’s discussions of time-binding (e.g., hieroglyphs carved in stone) versus space-binding means of communication (e.g., newspapers) are to be read as arguments which appreciate different communication media as the driving force behind changes in the formation of “monopolies of knowledge” (Innis 1971 [1951], 3–4). We could thus understand the historical differences between human civilizations by examining the nature of their leading communication media and the question of what kind of dissemination of knowledge and power structures it favours (Babe 2006, 46).

From this perspective, Meyrowitz (1994) is in a position to argue that Innis's lasting legacy consists in the fact that he offered a dynamic conception of communications that places their "inherent" technological properties in the foreground: hence, for example, the historical argument that the "medieval Church's monopoly over religious information, and thereby salvation, was broken by the printing press", which "bypassed the Church's scribes and allowed for the wider availability of the Bible and other religious texts" (ibid., 51).

It is not to be denied that Innis referred to the transformative power of communication media. However, if one looks at his texts from outside of the framework of how medium theorists interpret him, things start to look different. In Innis's *The Bias of Communication*, "the origins of social change vary considerably" and communication technology is by no means "the primary source of change"; instead, it "may be the pattern of the Nile's flooding, foreign invasion, military victory or defeat, the invention of new gods and new ideas, or numerous other novelties" (Blondheim 2003, 171–172). While communication media may help marginalized groups in their attempts to overturn established power structures, this is not dictated by what these technologies afford. Much depends on how they are used in particular historical conditions. Thus, we need to think of the rise of, say, radio from the viewpoint of how it was socially, politically and economically embedded in different national contexts. In the case of United States, it was developed in the context of well-entrenched capitalist economic structures and actors who had an interest in "controlling demographic markets and political-economic territories" (Comor 2003, 95). In comparison, as is well-known, radio was put to very different use in Fascist states or in social-democratic countries of Western Europe in the early to mid-twentieth century. Judging by this historic record, whatever technological potentials and consequent communicative capacities radio has, its wider impact on society is heavily mediated by the instrumental needs of political and economic powers. None of this follows a mechanistic law, however, as the practical institutionalization of radio in the United States, for instance, was affected by heated political struggles between different social groups (e.g. McChesney 2008, 157–180).

Closer to our own times, many activities associated with the internet – file sharing, the writing and reading of fan fiction or the open source model of knowledge creation – are forms of social co-operation which occur outside of the realm of the capital relation. Yet while these internet-based activities test the limits of dominant political-economic control mechanisms, they have not liberated us from them. Because of his sensitivity to material power, Innis did not succumb to any naive technological optimism when assessing the development of communications (Comor 2003, 94–100). By the same token, his work in fact runs counter to the central cohesive principle of medium theory, namely its technology-centredness. By contrast, with McLuhan we enter into a different mode of analysis that complies with that principle.

McLuhan's early work on advertisements – *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951) – has a different approach compared to his later work on media technology. In that book, he described the various textual and visual means by which those working in the advertisement industry aimed at getting "inside the collective public mind [...] in order to manipulate" it, instead of using "the new commercial

education as a means to enlightening its intended prey” (McLuhan 1967 [1951], v). At this stage, McLuhan was writing as a literary critic, offering content analysis of newspaper advertisements as a means of educating the public and even liberating them from the “collective dream” (ibid.) into which they had been lulled by Madison Avenue. As Flayhan (2005, 241) argues, “this is an idea that McLuhan was come to reject entirely”, in favour of a view according to which the new electronic media, especially television, “will free alienated Industrial (Gutenberg/Literate) Man”.

This view emerged from McLuhan’s immersion in the work of Innis and the peculiar way with which he merged it with cultural anthropology in the 1950s (Czitrom 1982, 171–173). What was crucial for his later work was the idea that communications determine the ways in which humans perceive the world around them. According to McLuhan, the effect of media for society and culture was not generated by its “messages” but by its form, that is, by the medium itself which shapes consciousness and social interaction through its technological features (Meyrowitz 2003, 197). For McLuhan (1964), technologies are “extensions of man”, and media technologies, in particular, are extensions of the human senses and the central nervous system. As different media relate to human senses differently, they also cause alterations in “sense ratios” (i.e., emphasizing certain senses at the expense of others) (ibid., 33). When a given means of communication or media technology is widely adopted, it will define the character of an epoch and induce changes in human perception, and thereby culture.

This was the basis on which McLuhan made a distinction between three stages in the history of civilization. Oral cultures are characterized by the predominance of speech and thus of the ear, but also by direct face-to-face contact, immersion, unified in-depth experiences and the interplay of all senses. A dramatic shift occurred with the development of the phonetic alphabet and, later, printing. These innovations created literate societies that are dominated by the sense of sight. The phonetic alphabet breaks down the collective framework of preliterate cultures and destroys their sensual richness, separating those who can read from those who cannot, and giving rise to divergent experiences as people engage themselves in different types of literature (Meyrowitz 2003, 194). McLuhan argued that by comparison to orality, literacy fosters rationality, linearity, introspection, the fragmentation of perception and thereby better instrumental control over environment – and these features exist at the expense of “the ability to feel, express, and experience emotions” (Czitrom 1982, 174). Wholeness is replaced by a certain kind of one-dimensionality. With the invention of printing, we have another round of dramatic changes within literate societies:

“Printing from moveable type created a quite unexpected new environment – it created the PUBLIC. Manuscript technology did not have the intensity or power of extension necessary to create publics on a national scale. What we have called “nations” in recent centuries did not, and could not, precede the advent of Gutenberg technology.” (McLuhan 1962, no page number)

According to McLuhan, nationalism “derives from the ‘fixed point of view’ that arrives with print, perspective, and visual quantification” (ibid., 220). In other words,

the “Gutenberg Galaxy” of print technology supports nationalism, together with other abstract, non-direct forms of allegiance, and the regimentation of the world into “large territories” which “can be subjected to homogenized practices” (Meyrowitz 2003, 196). The “Gutenberg Galaxy” of print is therefore associated with standardization, uniformity and alienation – all in all, with a strongly negative valence.

After analyzing the phase of literacy in human social communication and civilization, McLuhan examines its downfall, and this is the issue in his later work. He claims that with the coming of electronic media technology, we have moved into a culture where “the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (McLuhan 1962, 31). McLuhan developed this theme especially in *Understanding Media*. With his trope of “global village”, he referred to a conceptualization according to which the “detrribalization” caused by phonetic alphabet and print is being supplanted by the process of “retribalization” caused by new electronic media. They restore the rich sensual spectrum and cohesive communal bonds of premodern societies, translating “the visual or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern” (McLuhan 1964, 58). This shift has global implications:

“the speed-up of the electronic age is as disrupting for literate, lineal, and Western man as the Roman, paper routes were for tribal villagers. Our speed-up today is not a slow explosion outward from center to margins but an instant implosion and an interfusion of space and functions. Our specialist and fragmented civilization of center-margin structure is suddenly experiencing an instantaneous reassembling of all its mechanized bits into an organic whole. This is the new world of the global village.” (McLuhan 1964, 93)

This – the vision of emerging global union made possible by the time-space demolishing character of electronic media technology – is quintessential McLuhan. His media-technological stage theory of history is unabashedly optimistic. According to him, new electronic technologies bring with them an extension of our senses and consciousness. They foster a mystical “collective awareness” lost because of print and literacy, and rediscovered, now on a global level, thanks to, for instance, the computer, whose capacity for “instant translation”

“promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson. The condition of ‘weightlessness’, that biologists say promises a physical immortality, may be paralleled by the condition of speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace.” (McLuhan 1964, 84)

Such epiphanies need to be understood in light of the influence not of Innis but of the French philosopher Henri Bergson on McLuhan (Flayhan 2005, 242), which explains

the heavy dose of romantic vitalism in his later works.<sup>14</sup> It needs to be noted that this feature in McLuhan's thinking, in combination with his other influences, made a lot of sense to his contemporaries in North America, especially to the younger generations. For one thing, he captured the importance of the new audiovisual culture of pop music and television in the creation of their formative experiences. More specifically, many topical events and processes of the period seemed to verify McLuhan's claims concerning the coming of a more sensuously wholesome culture: sexual revolution, the use of psychoactive drugs, the rise of new age spirituality or the quasi-tribalist gathering at Woodstock, all of these deeply alien to the "Western practical man" who had long ago suppressed tribal traits "within himself in the interest of efficiency" (McLuhan 1964, 59). In short, McLuhan's late work gave an explanation of the moral-emotional confrontation between the "organization man" (Whyte 1956) and the hippie dropout (Roszak 1969).

It would be easy to be dismissive of McLuhan simply by noting the basic naivety of his media-based neo-tribalism, which seems to have about the same level of credibility as some new age Gospel of the coming of the Age of Aquarius. But in retrospect, a treatment of this particular aspect of his work reveals a more interesting pattern. We can today see why his scenario of how the new media technologies supported the so-called 1968 generation in their "revulsion against imposed patterns" (McLuhan 1964, 21) is so patently over-optimistic. As I will note in Chapter 7, the anti-establishment, anti-state sensibilities of that generation were open to be fused, through hegemonic work, together with the constellation of emerging neoliberal politics, ideology and organizations. It is no coincidence that McLuhan himself was a favourite speaker in the advertising industry and in corporate motivation meetings (Czitrom 1982, 181–182). His teachings, according to which, for example, new information technologies ("automation") release energies for "imaginative participation" and call "men [sic] to the role of artist" (McLuhan 1964, 310), were very much in line with changes that were taking place in the field of production in economically advanced countries, and even more so with new trends in management philosophy that were taking steps towards the current rhetoric of innovation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). But such technological optimism, in case it wants to resist ideological co-optation, should be counterbalanced with such issues as power, capitalism and control. These were overlooked by McLuhan (Flayhan 2005, 244), despite his conservative anti-capitalist leanings (Havers 2003), just as they are today overlooked by numerous figures who could be regarded as heirs.

McLuhan's work has been attacked for its mystifying style, for its indifference to questions of validity and for its technological determinism (Pietilä 2005, 175–177). Besides questions of social power and control of media institutions, McLuhan paid virtually no attention to human agency regarding the direction of socio-cultural change; it was all dictated by the inner logic of technological development that was beyond human capacities. Thus, as Flayhan (2005, 245) notes, McLuhan saw his role

14 A fuller treatment of McLuhan would also have to pay attention to the impact of Catholicism on his medium theory. However, because of the intricacies that are involved in this subject and since this aspect seems to have little direct bearing on the ways in which McLuhan has influenced media-technological accounts of globalization (Chapters 4 and 5), I will not elaborate on it here. For a discussion of McLuhan's Catholicism in the context of his thinking on media, see e.g. Theall 2001; Havers 2003; Cooper 2006.



as a theorist not as someone who could offer guidance for how to alter things, but as someone who advises us to go with the flow of technological change: “Human beings experiencing ‘postliterate technology’ can comprehend their situation, but do not really need to because the study of the media is not predicated on Marx’s notion that the point is to change them, or even the academic idea that we theorize to understand, but on the Madison Avenue idea of ‘Why ask Why?’ or ‘Just do it’”. In his role as the “oracle of the electric age” (*Life*), McLuhan was most certainly not a despairing critic, but an enthusiastic believer in the technological sublime and in the idea that the “aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness is a natural adjunct of electronic technology” (McLuhan 1964, 21).

After his relatively brief star status in the 1960s and 1970s, the popularity of McLuhan’s theories declined in academic and public discussions (Meyrowitz 1985, 22; 2003, 200–205). Today he has been “resurrected” (ibid., 205), thanks to satellite television and the internet, which have aroused interest in McLuhan and re-elevated him back as a sage of new media. More than the gathering in front of the cathode ray tube, it is the internet that is believed to fulfil his prophecies of the coming of a new global civilization less dependent on literacy and more socially “involved”. Thus Levinson (1999) claims that McLuhan is even more topical today than in his own times, promoting McLuhan’s conceptions as guides for analyzing cyberspace.

Medium theory is not reducible to McLuhan, but his legacy is essential for it. A well-rehearsed defence of McLuhan, in use also today, is that his late work cannot be judged by normal standards of academic evaluation. It is not “linear” in the sense of offering testable hypotheses but more like a source of inspiration and imagination. Besides recent attempts to reinstate McLuhan, his pupils have succeeded in maintaining academic interest in the research orientation that he instigated. Neil Postman became world-famous with his best seller *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1986), which is a sharp critique of American television culture. This work carries on the tradition and the legacy of McLuhan, in the sense that Postman argues that each medium determines the kind of conversation for which it can be used. Against McLuhan, however, he sees the shift from literacy to electronic culture as a negative development. For Postman, television is a medium that trivializes everything; in contrast to writing, it cannot sustain rational argumentation. This constitutes a loss of meaningful political conversation and with that, democracy. In fact, Al Gore’s book on similar developments, cited at the beginning of this section, shares the spirit of Postman rather than McLuhan.

Postman’s work is one example of how medium theory has developed since the death of McLuhan, but it is of relatively limited importance for the topic of this research. By comparison, Meyrowitz’s *No Sense of Place* (1985) resonates strongly with academic globalization theory, upon which it has impacted directly. If we look at the primary works on mainstream globalization theory, we notice that Meyrowitz’s medium theory has been incorporated in many of them (e.g. Giddens 1991, 84; Appadurai 1996, 29; Held et al. 1999, 58; Tomlinson 1999a, 161–162). This link is understandable in light of Meyrowitz’s (1985, 308) suggestion that electronic media “have combined previously distinct social settings [...] and weakened the relationship between social situations and physical places”. Instead of looking at the how the media alters “sensory balance”,



Meyrowitz notes that electronic media rearranges social relations by destroying “the division of people into very different experiential worlds” (ibid., 5). They de-differentiate modern society in many ways, by bringing down the social walls which separate people, by blurring what is private and what is public, by making it impossible for political leaders to hide in their “private locations” as they need to come “to our level” in the media sphere – which allegedly decreases their authority – and by undermining the importance of physical place and distinct geographic territories as determinants of social behaviour (ibid., 5–7, 170). Electronic media “destroys the specialness of space and time”: through our access to them, “what is happening almost anywhere can be happening wherever we are. Yet when we are everywhere, we are also no place in particular” (ibid., 125).

In order to translate this into the vocabulary of current academic discourse, electronic media are forces of “deterritorialization”. Meyrowitz treats this phenomenon mainly in the context of the United States, rather than speculating on its global social and cultural implications. Nonetheless, Meyrowitz, and also McLuhan, have as their basis the same theoretical motive that comes across in academic globalization theory in general: namely, the idea that the most penetrating social change in recent times has occurred in the rearrangement of time and space and the emergence of a world whose contours cannot be grasped without putting the logic of media-technological networks to the fore. This is the reason that medium theory has had such an influence over globalization theory and discussions of media therein.<sup>15</sup>

As we will see in the following Chapters, medium theory has provided analytical inspiration for all of my selected theorists of globalization. Cultural globalization theorists (Chapter 6) share common interests with McLuhan’s analysis of how electronic media undermine the homogenizing and centralized control of territorial nation states associated with print and literacy. McLuhan’s medium theory is an important model for Castells (Chapter 4), in particular, who follows it very directly in his treatment of media technologies and in the conclusions that he draws regarding the social, political and cultural consequences of their historical change. McLuhan’s influence is considerable also for Lash (see Chapter 5; Lash 2002, 175ff). He theorizes the novelty of “global information culture” of electronic immediacy by noting its difference from the Gutenberg culture of symbolic representation, linearity and subject-object detachment. In addition, Lash follows McLuhan in developing further one of the themes mentioned by him, that is, the post- or transhumanistic notion that “we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness” (McLuhan 1964, 19). The fusion of humans and technology – centred around the trope of the “cyborg” – is currently a popular academic topic. In dealing with it, Lash makes a heavy use of vitalist philosophy, which also figures, as was noted above, in McLuhan’s late work.

On the basis of such links, one is tempted to ask whether Castells’s and Lash’s interventions in the world of global media and communication flows offer little more than just recycled McLuhan. In any case, as these examples and those that will be given in the following Chapters demonstrate, McLuhan’s long shadow extends today far

<sup>15</sup> McLuhan’s impact has grown also because his ideas have travelled from North America especially to Western Europe (e.g. Debray 1996; Bolz 1999; Gane 2005), giving impetus to contemporary discourses on “media philosophy”.

beyond medium theory itself. This continuing influence produces results that need to be examined with a critical eye and with the help of a linear mode of argumentation, however antiquated that may sound to the ears of contemporary McLuhanists.

### 3.6 Concluding Remarks

The aim of this Chapter was to bring forth three influential media research traditions, the examination of which can help us to understand the arguments made by various globalization theorists in the following Chapters. The political economy of the media is interesting as a point of comparison against which their positions can be situated, especially as they take explicit distance from this tradition (see Ampuja 2004, 69–71). The trajectory of cultural studies offers background for my analysis of the key themes of cultural globalization theory (Chapter 6), and my treatment of medium theory is of use for assessing the media-technological paradigm, in particular (Chapters 4 and 5). Yet before proceeding to conduct a close reading of the work of my selected theorists, I want to make two brief disclaimers.

First, in my distinction between essential media research traditions in this Chapter, I have not been concerned to register attempts to merge them. For example, Comor (2003), in much the same way as Flayhan (2005), has tried to show that by taking into account the insights of Innis (rather than McLuhan), it is possible to synthesize medium theory with political-economic analysis of media. From a different viewpoint, Graham (2007, 237) argues that the mainstream political economy of communication lacks “a comprehensive theory of value” and that Innis and McLuhan could be of use for the field if it wants to make sense of the specificities of how value is being created in current digital networks. Approaching the possibility of another kind of combination, Bassett (2006, 227, 230) suggests a deeper engagement between cultural studies and medium theory, so that cultural studies would break free from its “semiotic/discursive channels” which make it incapable of dealing with the ways in which new forms of media technology have changed culture and led to “the end of an era in which *encoding-decoding* style theorisations of reception might pertain”. Along with these examples, we might also add the attempts to fuse insights from cultural studies and political economy, rather than considering them as perspectives that are always at loggerheads (see e.g. articles in Ferguson and Golding 1997; Hesmondhalgh 2007, 44–49).

From my viewpoint, the justified reason for such attempts lies in the fact that none of the traditions, by themselves, can provide full responses to the question of how media and social power are intertwined. For instance, representatives of cultural studies, especially today, are often weak in noticing how economic and institutional dynamics place limits on the kinds of media texts that circulate in the public, while political economists of the media are often uninterested in coming to grips with how political struggles are being waged at the level of symbolic forms. Such variable, but also interrelated, focuses open up the need of syntheses of different paradigms. However, one should also note that the possibilities for such syntheses are predicated on the capability to understand the central theoretical tensions that have affected the

development of media research historically and which have proven to be hard to resolve (e.g., Robins 1994, 465). This study is an attempt to make sense of those tensions in the context of academic globalization theory.

The second disclaimer is the fact that in my review of different academic approaches to media, I have left out perspectives that could have been introduced into the discussion. I have claimed that the three paradigms listed above are indeed the most essential ones with regard to academic globalization theory: they relate to the kinds of theoretical approaches and arguments that we come across on a regular basis in academic globalization literature dealing with the media. Naturally, this does not mean that there are no other perspectives besides political economy, cultural studies and medium theory that could have been discussed; but, to repeat a point made in the introduction, I should note that I am interested in the main channels and not in the whole vast delta of different possible viewpoints. What is common to all the theorists whose work I will now discuss is their high interest in media as the key to current dynamics of globalization and socio-cultural change, and the ways in which their arguments about the media hinge on the theoretical perspectives that were discussed in this Chapter.



## **PART II THE SPACE BEYOND THE PLACE: TECHNOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF MEDIA AND GLOBALIZATION**



#### 4. BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW: MANUEL CASTELLS, THE MEDIA AND THE SPACE OF FLOWS

A decade after the original publication of Manuel Castells's trilogy on "The Information Age", no one can deny the huge impact that he has had on social sciences throughout the world. Castells can legitimately be regarded as one of the leading sociologists of our time, comparable in popularity and influence only to such names as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman or Ulrich Beck (who, not coincidentally, are all also seminal names in the field of academic globalization theory). In fact, his work has been considered to be so magisterial in the assessment of recent global developments – in social relations, economy, culture, politics, identity and technology – that reviewers have felt that it can only be appreciated enough if one compares it to groundbreaking classics of the calibre of Marx or Weber. Such praises may be strained, but even many commentators who have been critical of the trilogy have acknowledged that it is a "brilliant achievement" (van Dijk 1999, 128), "a *tour de force*" (Webster 2002, 123). If there were a Nobel Prize for social scientists, Castells would be a strong candidate for it.

Castells's influence is not limited to the world of academia, for he has established himself also as a favoured speaker at the meetings of non-governmental organizations, politicians and the business world. Indeed, such is his popularity that he is forced to "decline 85 percent" of "about 1000 invitations" that he receives from these various planning and decision-making groups every year (Castells and Ince 2003, 20). Perhaps most influentially, he has worked as a counsellor for the European Commission, UNESCO, OECD, US AID, World Bank and a host of national governments (Portugal, Spain, Mexico, Ecuador, Finland and Russia), among other powerful institutions. At the same time, commentary on his work in academia has continued, culminating in the publication of a three volume set of articles and essays that trace the development of Castells's thinking and offer a collection of writings that deal with his *magnum opus* (Webster and Dimitriou 2004).

Castells's academic career has been a long one, dating back to the politically tumultuous times of the 1960s. Castells was born in Catalonia in Spain. As a young student activist, he was forced to flee the Franco government in the early 1960s. He arrived in France and began his academic career with the hope of doing research on strategies of class struggle (Castells and Ince 2003, 7–11). Instead, he ended up doing a doctoral dissertation on urban sociology which was, in his own words, "a statistical analysis of patterns of industrial location in the metropolitan area of Paris" (*ibid.*, 12). This study was done in the mid-1960s under the supervision of French sociologist Alain Touraine, who was an influential figure in the emerging analysis of "postindustrial society" and its social movements, themes which would later resurface in Castells' own studies.

Astonishingly, Castells (who had by now become an assistant professor in University of Paris) was expelled again in the late 1960s, this time from France following his participation in the May 68 events. After this incident, he held academic posts in Chile and Canada. However, following an intervention by Touraine, a pardon from the

de Gaulle government ensued in 1970 and Castells was able to return to France. He continued his work on urban sociology and finished his first book on the subject in 1972. During the 1970s, Castells published mainly in French, Italian and Spanish, and the staple of his work around this time was the use of Marxist theory in the research of cities and their social movements, combined with empirical analysis (Castells and Ince 2003, 13–16).

An important question, both in relation to the development of Castells's ideas and the way in which he conceives contemporary social change, is his relationship to Marxist theory. Today Castells maintains that already in the 1970s he was "much more 'American' than 'French' in [his] style of research, always interested in empirical inquiry, then adding a French theoretical touch" (Castells and Ince 2003, 16). The latter description refers to his original interest in Marxism; he cites Nicos Poulantzas as his main influence in this regard. Indeed, in 1980 Castells published a book on economic crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism. It was wholly Marxist in its foundations, using such familiar categories as "extraction of surplus value" and "falling rate of profit" to chart the question of what kind of problems capitalism, as a social system based on exploitation and class division, faced in terms of its stability, reproduction and long-term social legitimation (Castells 1980). However, this book, which is perhaps the most theoretically informed by the author, signalled the end of Castells's Marxist period, after which he adopted post-Marxist frameworks of analysis.

In the late 1970s Castells became a visiting professor in several American universities and his work took a more cultural turn. He published a new study, *The City and the Grassroots* (Castells 1983), which was once again about urban social movements, though this time from a cross-cultural perspective that shunned class analysis in favour of the idea that these movements (such as the gay community in San Francisco) were expressions of diverse (not exclusively class-based) struggles for "collective consumption", maintenance of group-based identity and participation in politics.

The influence of Touraine is obvious here, as the conclusions that Castells has offered in his studies on the nature of social movements in post-industrial society have broadly followed the same un-Hegelian course as Touraine's. Touraine ended up proposing that one should not concentrate on some unified collective agent that would carry on working class revolt in the changed setting of post-industrial society (the "technical intelligentsia"). Rather, he argued that this view should be replaced with a notion of new social movements, which had heterogeneous and cultural rather than systemic goals (Knöbl 1999, 410–412, 419). Similarly, for Castells, the urban movements' struggles were not fought in order to overcome the antagonist class structure of the society; instead, they were about the realization of a vision of an "alternative city" with more autonomy, creativity and tolerance and less hierarchy.

The next work by the author brought information technology into the picture, as he became interested in Silicon Valley with its "technological ingenuity, business innovation, and cultural change" (Castells and Ince 2003, 17). Despite its title, the new theme with which he dealt in his next main work, *The Informational City* (Castells 1989), was the impact of information technology on the spatial transformation not only of certain urban locations of production but of the economy at large. From the late



1980s onwards, Castells showed less interest in examining specific developments in a given region or city and focused more on the realization that “the actual dynamics of a given territory rely mainly on the connection of the population and activities of that territory to activities and decisions that go far beyond the boundaries of each locality” (Castells and Henderson 1987, 7). While Castells has incorporated the study of urban areas into his recent work and notes their importance for global network structures, *The Informational City* was a clear precursor to his ambitious 1500-page “Information Age” trilogy. The trilogy goes explicitly beyond urban sociology to chart the economic, social and cultural implications of the new “Network Society” that we are now witnessing on a global scale, according to Castells. Yet clear traces of Castells’s former interests remain in the books that he has produced in the 1990s and afterwards. For all of Castells’s investment in the unpacking of how technological transformations change the material basis of society, he has continued to emphasize that social movements with strong identity claims are important culturally and politically.

This brief exposition shows how Castells’ analyses of the network society emerged out of his earlier concerns. But how should we situate them in relation to contemporary social theory in general and especially to the topic of globalization?

There is no clear-cut way to categorize the work of Castells, just as it is difficult to offer a common characterization of the recent work of, say, Ulrich Beck, Scott Lash, Zygmunt Bauman or Anthony Giddens. Webster (2002, 97–123) discusses Castells’s trilogy in the context of theories of information society. This is one possibility, though, in my view, a somewhat restricting one. To my mind, it is better to refer to the general rise of *Zeitdiagnose* among leading contemporary sociologists. This mode of analysis is concerned with such questions as who we are and how our era is different from the earlier one (Noro 2004, 24). It is, in the words of Michel Foucault (1986, 96), dealing with “the ontology of the present”, a critical philosophical attitude that is not directed at the “analytic of truth” but at asking such questions as “what is our present?”, and “what is the contemporary field of possible experience?” The rise of sociological diagnoses of our time has contributed to this attitude and produced a host of concepts and theories that aim at understanding the passage from modernity (or capitalism or industrial society) to another kind of modernity, for which there are many different names and theories but which all target seemingly similar processes (see section 7.3).

The most central one of these named processes is globalization (regardless of how different authors describe it). I want to back up this claim by noting that even though not all key sociologists who have written about the passing of “simple” (etc.) modernity would characterize it as being about liquid modernization (Bauman 2000) or cosmopolitanization (Beck 2002), almost all of them have discussed it in relation to the theme of globalization, and very explicitly so. Globalization is the most substantive area of interest in this newfound challenge to classical social theory, although one must note that because of the fact that “the beauty of *Zeitdiagnose* is often evanescent” (Heiskala 2004, 46), globalization may no longer shine with such luminosity as was once the case. Be that as it may, new diagnoses and concepts overrun former ones in a frenzied sociological search for the “new logic” or -ization that would capture the true essence of the contemporary moment.

Whatever the case may be regarding the general tone of contemporary sociology, we may still legitimately ask if Castells's recent work best described as globalization theory? The short answer is yes and no, but before answering this question more conclusively, we must first determine how theoretical his work is in the first place.

According to Castells, *The Information Age* is "not a book about books" (Castells 2000a, 25). The meaning of this sentence lies in the attempt by the author to highlight his role as an empirical sociologist and not as a social theorist. Indeed, Castells presents a wealth of empirical material on rates of economic productivity, employment, internet hosts and infant mortality (etc.) to substantiate his conclusions. We should not be blind to the fact that Castells wants to avoid "abstract theorizing" (Webster 2002, 99), so typical for humanities and social sciences after the so-called linguistic turn. This probably explains the popularity of his trilogy to some extent. Nonetheless, I think it is beyond doubt that his fame – especially in the general public world – is based on the imaginative concepts that he has produced as a contemporary diagnostician of society, rather than on his figures and tables or his own research. In this sense, Castells is a theorist of society in the same way that, say, Ulrich Beck is with his analyses of the "risk society" or "cosmopolitization" (Beck 1992; 2006).

In his very short methodological explanation in the first volume of the trilogy, Castells (2000a, 25–27) avoids entering into far-reaching theoretical discussions. He simply mentions that he has been influenced by the triad of Alain Touraine, Daniel Bell and Nicos Poulantzas – which brings his work into the orbit of theories of post-industrialism, information society and Marxism, respectively – and notes that his own thinking on "informationalism" aims to be "as autonomous and non-redundant as possible". Indeed, one of the main problems that any commentator of Castells faces is that he consciously avoids clarifying his own perspective from a theoretical angle. As a consequence, the reader is left to uncover the theoretical foundations of his work from the text itself (where they interlace with empirical examples), from the concepts used and from the more general conclusions that he offers from time to time. There is an article (Castells 2000c) where the author clarifies his theoretical approach, but this is more of a conceptual schemata than a serious attempt to anchor his work in existing social theories. "I am trying to distil theory from observation", Castells remarks cavalierly. For the author, theory is simply "a research tool", something that organizes research and which is "open to rectification" – in brief, a "disposable theory" (ibid., 6, *passim*).

Such comments merit some doubt, for it is rather bold (epistemologically speaking) to state that one "distils theory from observation" – as if there is a possibility for some kind of unmediated relation between the researcher and the object of analysis. Castells maintains that whatever theoretical model he uses, it is subservient to his role as someone who is just "exploring our world" (Castells 2000b, 4) and "relying [...] on [his] own observations" (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 137). However, as Smart (2000, 54) points out, to "be able to explore 'our world', that is to examine and investigate it, the analyst has of necessity to already be in possession of some sense of that world". Castells undermines his theoretical influences in such formulations. The global reality in its different economic, social and cultural aspects is, after all, a fairly wide-ranging subject.

I think that the frameworks from which Castells proceeds to analyze and organize that immense reality can be made visible.

Together with all variants of sociological diagnoses of our time, *The Information Age* is a mixture of different elements that together form a problematic that is characteristically Castellsian. As was noted above, Castells himself mentions his main influences in passing. Heiskala (2004, 47) expands on these when he points out that his work is a modification of the thesis of post-industrial society (it emphasizes the rise of service economy and knowledge production as the basis of productivity), the theory of information society (it places information technology and the circulation of information at the centre of things) as well as being about globalization (of which more in a short while). It also uses certain Marxist categories, but none of these traditions on its own has bred the brainchild of Castells. The author has used them selectively. For instance, there is no trace of a labour theory of value in the trilogy, or class analysis in its traditional sense, which thus separates it from characteristically Marxist critiques. On the other hand, Castells attempts to disconnect his thinking from any hint of technological determinism that hampers mainstream information society analysis (ibid.).

What is the situation with globalization theory, then? Together with the fact that Castells operates in a number of analytic paradigms, his project is also broad in terms of the subjects that he discusses. The trilogy offers a treatment of an impressive amount of recent or still on-going social developments, such as changes in gender relations and sexuality, the collapse of Soviet Union, the rise of fundamentalist ideologies and the role of environmentalism. Because of this broad scope, it would be questionable to claim that his work is simply about “globalization”, even though the academic globalization debate is famous for its all-embracing inclusiveness. Castells does not start from a working definition of globalization, after which he would then move on to link everything that follows to that process – as is the case in the work of Held et al. (1999). However, as I claimed in Chapter 2, what lies behind this concept in its academic usage is above all a reference to a certain spatio-temporal logic – the basic expression of which is the notion of intensified worldwide integration or interconnectedness – which is then claimed to be the most salient feature of contemporary society. If we keep this point in mind, Castells’ work has close ties to the existing academic globalization debate, even if these ties are not always explicit conceptually.

The “overarching purpose” which is present in all of Castells’s work is the attempt to understand “the emergence of a new social structure” as a shift to the “informational society” (Castells 2000a, 18, 21, 26). These notions are already significant. The concept of “network society”, however, which Castells also uses repeatedly, brings his thinking even closer to the problematic that is centrally present in the books and articles of leading globalization theorists. Castells repeats in many different variations the key argument of mainstream academic globalization theory, according to which place-based social structures give way to networks and flows. These flows penetrate all aspects of society and culture: they give rise to a “new economy”, new kinds of human interactions and new cultural experiences, as well as providing new frames for political struggle.

While the logic of networks and flows does not command everything under the sun directly, their impact is nonetheless universal for Castells. In the same way in which Beck (in Gane 2004, 151) claims that new forms of “renationalization” that are now appearing because of globalization can only be understood in relation to that master category, Castells argues that the new logic of informationalism challenges all those social and cultural forms that are resistant to it (see especially Castells 2000c, 16). For Castells (2000a, 3; 2004a, 2), the main political issue shaping the contemporary world is “a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self”, that is, between the universal instrumentalism of “technology-induced globalization” and historically rooted particularistic identities, an opposition that gives rise to both proactive and reactive social movements.

Underlying such an analysis is the idea that time and space are essential concepts for social theory. They are the “material foundations of our life” (Castells 2000c, 13). According to Castells, these foundations have recently been redefined. The notions that he uses for these redefinitions are “spaces of flows” and “timeless time”. These concepts refer to the idea, first, that places and localities are “reintegrated into functional networks” (Castells 2000a, 406) and, second, that time is being “annihilated” (as everything is speeded up and compressed by technological networks) as well as “de-sequenced” (so that, for instance, traditional life-cycles are blurred, as in the case when parents choose to store embryos for later reproduction) (Castells 2000c, 13–14; 2004b, 145).<sup>1</sup>

Castells thus highlights the overcoming of limits to social practices that were formerly territorially fixed or subordinated to rhythms of biology or industrial society (Castells 2000a, 507–508). He is perceptibly interested in precisely this spatio-temporal dimension of social change, referring to many other sociologists and social theorists who have dealt with similar concerns, such as Harold Innis (1971 [1951]), Anthony Giddens (1984), David Harvey (1990) and Scott Lash and John Urry (1994). So important is this theme for the author that he reserves two whole chapters for the discussion of space and time. He even embarks, quite uncharacteristically in light of his overall wish to avoid extensive theorization, on a specific discussion of “some fundamentals of a social theory of space” in the first volume of *The Information Age* (Castells 2000a, 440ff).

In part, this emphasis can be understood via reference to Castells’s previous work in urban sociology – which explains the fact that the theory of space is “one of [his] old trades” (Castells 2000a, 441). However, Castells is not merely interested in the social meaning of space as such, but, much more (especially in his works since the 1980s), in the processes of how space is produced and transformed. This issue was also examined by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who was a Professor in the sociology department of the University of Paris when Castells started his career there in the late 1960s (Castells and Ince 2003, 13). As a Marxist, Lefebvre (2009 [1979])

1 I will not examine Castells’ notion of “timeless time” closely in this study. Yet in connection with my criticisms of his work that will follow shortly, I want to note that this particular concept has been considered by many of Castells’ critics as his most unconvincing idea. For McLennan (2003, 562), it is “a near-mystical overstatement” that lacks proper empirical justification. This is, in fact, a more general feature of Castells’ work, and *Zeitdiagnose* at large: namely, the practice whereby he proposes a general “theoretical” concept that is supposed to represent a central fact of our social life, but whose importance he supports only by giving an example or two, without considering their prevalence.

made the point that the production of space under capitalism and its private property relations had resulted in the creation of bureaucratically controlled “abstract space” that “is utilized to produce surplus value” and that is “erasing all spatial differences” (ibid., 187–188). This emphasis, as well as Lefebvre’s dream of “socialist space” that would end the instrumentalist domination and uses of space – as well as pave the way for a better society as a whole – is not present in Castells’s analysis of informational societies.<sup>2</sup> Yet in his treatment of “abstract space”, Lefebvre prefigured one central theme that would appear in Castells’s later works, namely, the idea that because of “the direct intervention of knowledge in material production”, the production of space “is oriented differently. One can speak of an economy of flow: the flow of energy, the flow of raw materials, the flow of labor, the flow of information” and so forth (ibid., 186). Furthermore, “this abstract space depends on vast networks of banks, businesses, and great centers of production”, as well as “information networks” that expand globally (ibid., 187; see also Lefebvre 2009 [1973]).

According to such analysis, changes in modern societies can be approached best by studying new kinds of spatial practices that point to the overcoming of former constraints of space and time in social relations (see Mosco 1996, 173). Similarly, Hoogvelt (1997, 127) notes that “for Castells too, the point of departure is time/space compression”. Here it needs to be noted that Castells sees the modalities of time and space as being interrelated. He makes the link visible by claiming that “space is the material support of time-sharing social practices” so that it “brings together those practices that are simultaneous in time” (2000a, 441). In the new network society envisioned by Castells, the “material support” for this process works through flows that are “constituted by a circuit of electronic exchanges” (ibid., 442).

While Castells also pays attention to historical continuities, his primary interest is in the transformation of the society. Here is a passage towards the end of the first volume of the trilogy, in which Castells (2000a, 500) sums up the lessons of his explorations:

“as an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. [...] I would argue that this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of the special social interests expressed through the networks; the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power.”

This constitutes Castells’s “overarching conclusion”. Notable here is, once again, his forceful investment in the notion of networks and flows, that is, in those aspects of change whose consequences are intimately connected to shifts in previous modalities of time and space. Whatever concepts Castells uses to highlight social transformations

2 Influenced by Althusser in the 1970s, Castells (1977) was very critical of Lefebvre’s works on urban sociology, accusing him of fetishizing space, i.e., “attributing to the spatial causal determinacy over the societal” (Merrifield 2006, 101). Lefebvre, in turn, claimed that Castells (at that time) worked “with a simplistic Marxist schema” (ibid., 102).

– whether in the economy, culture or politics – these always refer back to the idea that we now live in a network society, in a society whose structure is no longer as fixed in space and time as it used to be (and which is also less hierarchical and centralized). The structure that now prevails is the “new social morphology” of informational networks that shape social organizations and relationships of production, consumption, power and experience in ways that are more diffuse and complex than ever before. Thus for Castells, the transformation of the society (despite certain aspects of it remaining the same) refers to the spatio-temporal reorganization of society. It is based on the overwhelming presence of informational networks and flows that “tend to assert the predominance of social morphology over social action” (Castells 2000c, 16).

What I argue, then, is that because of Castells’s understanding of where the essential transformations of society take place – they take place “at the deeper level” of time and space, resulting in new “material foundations of society” (Castells 2000a, 507) – he contributes strongly to the same “spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory” that lies at the heart of mainstream academic globalization discussions writ large (see Chapter 2).

In order to see this crucial aspect of Castells’s analysis more clearly, we need to take note of the specific way in which the author conceives spatio-temporal reorganizations of society and culture, as they can, of course, be analyzed from very different perspectives. David Harvey (1990, 355) discusses reorganizations of space and time predominantly as transformations that occur “within the overall logic of capitalist development”. He makes the cautionary point that they should be seen “more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new postcapitalist or even postindustrial society” (*ibid.*, vii). Castells, too, refrains from saying that we have entered a world beyond capitalism (although it is now “informational capitalism”), but there is still a big difference in emphasis between his work and that of Harvey’s. Castells (2000a, 492–493) believes that Harvey “gives to capitalist logic more responsibility than it deserves for current processes of cultural transformation”. In fact, the dismissal of a Marxist perspective is typical for contemporary debate over the social meaning of time and space in general. The same emphasis comes across in the conclusion of Castells’s first volume of the trilogy, where he discusses the change in social relationships of production:

“while capitalist relationships of production still persist (indeed, in many economies the dominant logic is more strictly capitalist than ever before), capital and labor increasingly tend to exist in different spaces and times: the space of flows and the space of places, instant time of computerized networks versus clock time of everyday life.” (Castells 2000a, 506)

Thus, while Castells notes the importance of a “capitalist logic”, this is not what concerns him the most. He mentions it in the citation, as elsewhere in his recent work, mainly in order to discuss the reorganizations of time and space (“the networking logic”) that, as noted, represents “social determination of a higher level than that of the special social interests expressed through the networks”. For Castells, technology is

the primary determinant in social change. He sees it as increasingly disembedded from social relationships and the dynamics of specifically capitalist globalization.

What this means is that Castells advances a spatio-temporal problematic for social theory in a way that eventually makes it stand as an *explanation* of social and cultural change. An example of this stance is also the idea (to repeat another point made by Castells in the above citation) that “networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture”. None of this reasoning is offered in an oversimplified manner, for Castells makes many qualifications during the course of his presentation. But the reversal of *explanans* and *explanandum* – the replacement of existing sociological perspectives with a specific spatio-temporal problematic – does ultimately happen in the work of Castells, “whose concept of a ‘network society’ was designed to illuminate a newly dominant social reality ‘organized around the space of flows and timeless time’” (Rosenberg 2005, 5).<sup>3</sup> This reality constitutes a leading motive of Castells’s analysis of the network society: it identifies what is fundamentally new in the society and culture, and it is the examination of these spatio-temporal transformations for which he reserves his most energetic and eloquent contributions in terms of conceptual development and theoretical discussion.

For these reasons, I maintain that Castells’s work is situated in the hard core of academic globalization theory. In any case, while Castells does not use the concept of globalization unsparingly, his work is a standard reference in the academic globalization debate and it would be hard to understand this debate without acknowledging Castells’s contributions.

But how does the media and communication fit in with this picture? In part, the answer is fairly obvious for anyone who has at least glanced through the main works of the author. First of all, developments in information and communication technologies, and especially the emergence of the internet, forms the basis on which Castells builds his idea of a new “social morphology” that dominates the Information Age: the network that Castells speaks about is primarily a communications network. Furthermore, the spatio-temporal frame of reference that he uses for the analysis of social and cultural transformations is logically connected to arguments that refer to changes in information and communication technologies.

This does not mean that Castells has no interest in other forms of technology. He writes also of biotechnology and genetic engineering in the trilogy, although “the biotechnology revolution” had not happened with such magnitude in the 1990s that he could have observed it in earnest in that work (Castells and Ince 2003, 48). Discussion of information and communication technologies forms the core of *The Information Age*. Castells (2000a, 5) writes at the start of his first volume that “the information technology revolution, because of its pervasiveness throughout the whole realm of human activity, will be my entry point in analyzing the complexity of the new economy, society, and culture in the making”. In general, it seems that the identification of changes in information and communication technologies suffices for Castells as the

3 As I noted in Chapter 2, Rosenberg has criticized this overemphasis on time and space in globalization theory extensively. Yet, to my knowledge, he has not analyzed the work of Castells, beyond making short references.



ground from which he proceeds to pinpoint a shift to a different kind of modernity. “What is new in our age is a new set of information technologies” (Castells 2000c, 10).<sup>4</sup>

Apart from conceiving new information and communication technologies as the material basis of the network society, Castells writes also of the media (both the “old” and the “new”) as a set of social and cultural phenomena. He connects this topic to a number of themes. The discussion of changing contours of politics is important in this respect. Castells (2004a, chapter 6) notes critically the rise of what he calls “informational politics” and the concurrent “crisis of democracy”. He examines the extent to which the media is to blame for the situation. He also sheds light on the other side of the coin by pointing to the use of media by various non-governmental or non-parliamentary actors (such as environmentalists and “insurgent” movements in less developed countries) (ibid., 163–164, 186–189) in their search for public visibility and political effect. Besides the function of the media in political power struggles, Castells also discusses the development of media systems themselves (although very briefly), by linking his examination of the loss of state power to changing media regulation (ibid., 316–321). In addition, he reserves one full chapter (Castells 2000a, chapter 5) for a survey of how the media has changed historically and how this affects our culture. These are the main themes, but because of Castells’s overall model of social change, arguments concerning the impact of the media and communications (especially, of course, the “new media”) come up in many other instances as well.

Before a further discussion of Castells’s analysis of media and communications, which forms the main theme of this Chapter, we need to have a better grasp of Castells’s work as a whole. I will start with the general character of his trilogy and then move on to review some of the key arguments that Castells makes concerning the nature of global network society.

#### 4.1 The Information Age as *Zeitdiagnose*

The Information Age consists of three large volumes that appeared originally in 1996–1998. Each of these volumes has been updated (Castells 2000a; Castells 2000b; Castells 2004a), but they are still divided into the following themes. The first volume concentrates on “The Rise of the Network Society”: it discusses the “information technology revolution” and how it has changed the economy and labour processes. It also discusses the issue of how new information and communication technologies have fostered a cultural transformation, a shift to a “culture of real virtuality. The remaining chapters of the book note the “spatio-temporal” shifts mentioned above. All in all, the first volume establishes a structural foundation for Castells’ further analyses in the following two books.

4 In this context, as in other instances of his analysis of the information age, Castells also points to the “biology revolution” and “the design and manipulation of living organisms” (e.g. Castells 2000c, 10) as additional technological novelties. However, he does not discuss their social and cultural implications as extensively as those related to information technology (after all, the title for his trilogy is not “the biotech age”). He notes, of course, that recent advancements in biotechnology have been dependent on “massive computing power” and new information technology in general (Castells and Ince 2003, 50).



The second volume (“The Power of Identity”) is about social forces and movements and their relations to politics and power, “in the framework of and in interaction with the network society” (Castells 2004b, 139). Here, Castells discusses especially different identity-based groups who feel themselves challenged by the new social order. He also notes the problems that the nation state comes up against in the face of supranational institutions and flows of plural identities that undermine national integration. The third volume (“The End of Millennium”) focuses on important macro-sociological processes that have affected the globe in economic and political terms. Here Castells charts the collapse of Soviet Union, the rise of the Asian Pacific and European Union, as well as discussing global crime networks and mechanisms of social exclusion through poverty that pose threats to the legitimacy of the network society.

Webster (2002, 99) notes that vestiges of Marxism remain in the overall organization of Castells’s three volumes. What he means by this is that Castells examines all of his subjects from the viewpoint of totality, so that all of the different elements that he discusses connect to the structural theme of informationalism, networks, flows and globalization. In this way, he “stands out against today’s orthodox suspicion of totalistic explanation” (ibid.).

However, while Castells discusses the social world from a broad perspective, he is not interested in producing an account of the constituents of society from a general sociological theory viewpoint. That is, he does not produce “grand theory” which would analyze social action, social processes, social structures and culture at an abstract level (in the vein of, say, Marxist historical materialism, Parsons’ theory of social action or Giddens’ theory of structuration). Instead of writing in this vein, Castells aims at an “exploratory theory” of social change. He (2000c, 7–9; 2000a, 13–15) borrows from general sociological theory at a very basic conceptual level and offers some elementary discussion of what elements constitute the basis of social structure. Nonetheless, these can be seen merely as stepping-stones for the overall “Zeitdiagnostic” tendency of his work, which points towards the network society as “a new dominant social structure”.

As previously mentioned, *Zeitdiagnose* as a genre of sociological analysis is concerned with the question of what the essence of our time may be and how it departs from previous eras. Typical themes in such analysis are concepts or figures that aim at capturing the novel spirit of the age – for instance, a new character-type that replaces previously dominant forms of subjectivity (e.g., “narcissist”, Lasch 1979) or a new type of logic that animates all social processes (e.g., “reflexive modernization”, Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). The power of sociological diagnoses of our time lies in the fact that they offer visions that help us to connect different social and cultural phenomena together and to see their underlying unity. However, the concurrent downside of this genre is that its credibility risks being based on the suggestiveness of those “magical” concepts alone. It is quite typical for *Zeitdiagnose* that the claims made are supported only by scant empirical foundation (or they lack it completely) and this leads to doubts regarding the importance of this or that tendency that is supposed to lie at the heart of the new social formation. According to Noro (2004), *Zeitdiagnose* may be a good heuristic tool for thinking new research questions, but the value and status as a theoretical model for

more rigorous sociological research must be placed in doubt. Yet they “can be evaluated rationally by the sociological materials that [they] use” (ibid., 327).

Interestingly, Castells seems to have succeeded in putting forward a sociological diagnosis of our time that avoids some of the aforementioned pitfalls: his work is both conceptually suggestive and backed up by extensive empirical material. In addition, it is wide-ranging in the extreme and systematic in its form, compared with more philosophical and essayist analysis of the similar variety. Despite these virtues, there are reasons to approach Castells’s work critically. For example, the high premium that Castells places on networking logic at all levels of society can be criticized as one-sided, in the sense that it ignores the existence of formerly established hierarchies of power. Criticism along these lines will have to be based on a review of what kind of social processes and features Castells singles out as the most important ones and why. After such a review, we will be in a better position to see what he has left out of his analysis and with what kind of consequences.

I will next summarize some of the main points of *The Information Age*. In order to avoid getting mired in an overly detailed review of each and every theme that Castells covers in his study of over 1500 pages, I will deal here mostly with the first volume of the trilogy, which tells the story of how the new network society came into being and what its main structural characteristics are.<sup>5</sup> This limitation does not imply that Castells’ analyses in the two other volumes are of little significance. However, this study is about the role of the media in globalization theory and it would not be sensible to ruminate on the intricacies of, say, world-wide criminal activities, environmental movements or economic developments in the Asian pacific (themes examined at length by Castells in volumes two and three), as these processes, in themselves, lie outside the bounds of this study. Instead, I aim at a brief overview. The first volume of *The Information Age* as well as Castells’s article-length summations of it offer sufficient background for this. Themes taken up by Castells in the remaining two volumes (such as identity and politics) will be discussed in the later sections that focus on media and communications, in so far as they are pertinent to the subject.

## 4.2 Transformations of the Economy and Work

In his analysis of the rise of the network society, Castells concentrates heavily on its economic side. While he examines various aspects of the economy, it can be said that Castells is mostly interested in changes in production rather than on macroeconomics (trends that characterize the whole of the economy) (Scherrer 2001, 7). Castells’s treatment of the subject is original as a whole, but its core components are derivatives of certain orientations in economic theory. They also converge with the mainstream political landscape of the United States and other developed countries in the 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> Note that in the following section, I will examine those themes that have not yet been covered. I have already commented on his perspectives on changes in space and time, and the theoretical importance that he gives to these. Note also that I will discuss Castells’s treatment of culture in the information age, also part of the first volume, later, in the section that covers the main issue of this chapter, namely his analysis of media and communications.

Castells begins his analysis of the economy in the information age by claiming that we now live, on a worldwide scale, in a “new economy” that is of a fundamentally different nature compared with the old.<sup>6</sup> He identifies three features that mark the difference. First, the new economy is “informational”, whereby “the productivity and competitiveness of the units or agents in this economy (be it firms, regions, or nations) fundamentally depend upon their capacity to generate, process, and apply efficiently knowledge-based information”. Second, he notes that it is global “because the core activities of production, consumption, and circulation, as well as their components (capital, labor, raw materials, management, information, technology, markets) are organized on a global scale”. Third, the new economy is networked “because, under the new historical conditions, productivity is generated through and competition is played out in a global network of interaction between business networks” (Castells 2000a, 77). All of these features are based and dependent on information technologies and the “information technology revolution” that has taken the world by storm in the last quarter of the twentieth century, coming into full fruition in the 1990s (*ibid.*, 77, 148).

These general claims are followed by more specific elaborations. Regarding the informational nature of the economy, Castells argues that what is historically new in it is not the role of knowledge and information as such, as these are central also for agrarian and industrial modes of economic development – here one might think, for example, of the importance of scientific discoveries in the nineteenth century for the chemical industry or electronics. The novelty of informationalism lies in its deep penetration as a novel economic paradigm that centres on “knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication” (Castells 2000a, 17). Information and communication technologies are central for economic activities, both impacting on the production process as well as inducing new products that are more knowledge-intensive than before. In order to highlight the historical difference, Castells makes a distinction between the role of new energy sources for the industrial economy and the role of information technology and processing for the new “informational mode of development”:

“new information technologies allow the development of what we call positive feedback between the process of knowledge and application of knowledge. Let us, for instance, look at electricity: what electricity did was not important as long as the electrical engine was not able to process energy and to implement energy everywhere in all conditions. What information technology and particularly the Internet are doing these days is that we cannot only generate knowledge through the process of innovation but we can also make this knowledge specific and applied to any context, to any task anywhere. [...] This capacity of distributing knowledge, learning from what you do with this knowledge and fitting it back into the system in a self-expanding process, is really an essential feature of the New Economy.”  
(Castells 2004c, 151–152)

6 Castells’s chapter on the “informational” economy went through many changes between the first and the second edition. However, he did not “modify the key substantive elements of the overall analysis” in the latter (Castells 2000a, xvii).

For Castells, the informational economy is more flexible than was the case in earlier times of economic development; it is oriented towards the creation of new applications and products at a faster rate than in the manufacturing-based industrial economy that was associated with rigid mass production systems, unskilled workforce and stabilizing economic policies. These features have given way – especially since the crisis into which the advanced capitalist countries plunged in the early 1970s – to a different kind of production paradigm that has, according to Castells, pumped new vitality into the global economy.

The central element of his argument is centred on the concept of productivity. Castells maintains that “the first feature of the New Economy is the ability to develop through information and communication technology knowledge-based, innovation-based productivity growth” (Castells 2004b, 153). He grounds his arguments on statistical analyses and insists that we can now clearly observe substantial productivity growth in advanced economies, especially high-tech sectors but also, in the case of the United States at least, in the whole of the economy (Castells 2000a, 90–91; Castells 2000c, 10; Castells 2001c, 61). However, Castells is aware of the difficulties of measuring informational productivity unequivocally. He thus stresses the not-yet fully realized “productivity potential” of informational economy and information technologies (Castells 2000a, 99). All in all, Castells’s claims concerning the New Economy do not hinge merely upon empirical debates about productivity. For him, the essential fact is the process of creative destruction (Joseph Schumpeter) that has forged a historically specific form of economy with new conditions of competitiveness. This process phases out those economic agents that are unable to follow the rules of the New Economy. Underlying this qualitative shift is the most important change of all, namely, the technological ability of humanity to use “its superior capacity to process symbols” as “a direct productive force” (Castells 2000a, 100). It is a shift in production from the use of scarce resources to cheap information, so that “this time, resources are not coal and steel, but knowledge and entrepreneurialism” (Castells and Ince 2003, 25).

The informational nature of the New Economy goes a long way of explaining other aspects of Castells’s account of economic developments in recent decades. The second feature in his analysis is economic globalization. While noting that “most production, employment, and firms are, and will remain, local and regional”, he stresses the growth of international trade and financial markets, and the rise of transnational corporations as leading actors of the New Economy. Since the fordist model had exhausted itself by the early 1970s, this induced, according to Castells, leading nation states and markets to seek new economic growth strategies. Ideological free-marketeers came to power in the 1980s, pushing hard for deregulation and liberalization of finance and the opening of borders for investment, as well as supporting privatization. This neo-liberal policy line – which was crystallized by the economic rules and requirements set by the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization in the interests of transnational corporations and international finance – together with new information and communication technologies created the necessary context for economic globalization (Castells 2000a, 135ff).

This process consists of a number of interrelated aspects. Castells notes the increasing interdependence of economies especially through global financial markets and flows of capital, the expansion and diversification of trade between regions, and the internationalization of production. In addition to this, he points to the intensifying competition between individual nation states and the uneven character of economic globalization: “The new economy affects everywhere and everybody but is inclusive and exclusionary at the same time, the boundaries of inclusion varying for every society, depending on institutions, politics, and policies” (Castells 2000a, 161). Moreover, because of the velocity and the volatility of border-crossing financial capital, the whole global new economy is highly unstable and prone to enter into “recurrent financial crises with devastating effects on economies and societies” (ibid.), such as in East Asia in 1997, Russia in 1998 or Argentina at the turn of the millennium.

Finally, Castells ties up his discussion of the economy by claiming that at “the heart of the connectivity of the global economy and of the flexibility of informational production, there is a new form of economic organization, the *network* enterprise” (Castells 2000c, 10). Castells’ claims are here fairly similar to the views of certain theorists of post-fordism and flexible specialization – most notably Piore and Sabel (1984) – who emphasize a move from vertically integrated corporation, taylorist work settings and mass-production of standardized goods towards more flexible production processes and market segmentation. In keeping with this type of analysis, Castells argues that small and medium-sized firms and the clustered networks that they have formed regionally (Silicon Valley etc.) are more suitable for the new informational paradigm than the rigid and hierarchical large corporations of the industrial economy, which have gone through a process of vertical disintegration and internal de-centralization. These organizational changes are not solely caused but definitely “enhanced by new information technologies” (Castells 2000a, 185).

For Castells, the sign of the new times lies in the networked nature of production; instead of spatio-temporally stable forms of manufacturing economy, the New Economy is based on “specific business projects” (rather than firms) that “switch to another network as soon as the project is finished. Major corporations work in a strategy of changing alliances and partnerships, specific to a given product, process, time and space” (Castells 2000c, 11). However, transnational corporations do retain their importance also in the network society. Castells (2000a, 168) remarks that we are not in the midst of the loss of power of corporations as such, since they are in control of the main resources and the general development of the economy. Nonetheless, the point is that the “traditional corporate model of organization” is in crisis, unable to adapt to the changes set forth by the informational mode of development.

The concept of network refers to evolutionary tendencies in Castell’s analysis and structures it from head to toe. For him, networks have existed always in human societies, but now they are powered by information technologies. In the economy as well as in other levels of social organization, they “allow for co-ordination and management of complexity” and “an unprecedented combination of flexibility and task implementation, or co-ordinated decision making, and de-centralized execution” (Castells 2000c, 15). “By definition, a network has no centre” (ibid.). There are “nodes” in the network, some

of which are more important than others (such as metropolitan industrial centres of the global economy), but it is the network as a “new social morphology” that is the key aspect of the Information Age. Networks are indeed programmed by social actors, but once they are born, they impose their logic on actors, who “have to play their strategies within the rules of the network” (ibid., 16).

In this way, the network has become an evolutionary standard, much more important than the social forces that surround it. But there are also qualifications for this argument. One of them is of a cultural nature. Even if, as Castells (2000a, 209) claims, “globalization and informationalization seem to be structurally related to networking and flexibility”, this does not lead to uniform organizational development everywhere. He argues that in spite of economic and technological imperatives, cultural patterns affect the development of organizations in different regions of the world. Nonetheless, the new network economy is characterized by a distinctive cultural ethos, which Castells (2000a, 210–215) names, in a paean to Weber (and to the new informational capitalism itself), “the spirit of informationalism”. Here, Castells is faithful to his own communitarian principles (see pages 127–130 below). Instead of conceiving capitalist economic organizations as sites of social antagonism, he argues that there is a common “ethical foundation” of the network enterprise. It is an ethos of flexibility and multiplicity of values, “a culture of the ephemeral, a culture of each strategic decision, a patchwork of experiences and interests”. Such a fleeting postmodern ethos does not possess any coherent centre other than “the variable geometry required by informationalism”. Therefore, for Castells, “the spirit of informationalism” is not so much defined by culture (as a set of shared and contested common meanings) than by the technological infrastructure of the network economy: it is “a *multi-faceted, virtual culture*” that is wholly functional for the workings of that economy (ibid., 214–215).

While “the spirit of informationalism” is founded on technology and “the computer’s memory as [its] raw material” (Castells 2000a, 215), Castells’s real heroes are not machines (however intelligent) but people; or at least, certain groups of people and the network structures that they create. As noted, Castells places a high value on the human capacity to produce innovations, because “for the first time in history, the human mind is a direct productive force, not just a decisive element of the production system” (Castells 2000a, 31). It is on this basis that Castells also makes sweeping policy suggestions, exhorting nation states towards creating “innovation environments”. Innovation for him is “the fuel” of the New Economy (Castells 2004c, 158) and its “primordial function” (Castells 2001a, 100). It is “the product of intelligent labor, but of a collective intellect” (ibid., 101) that depends on open access to information and mutual co-operation. The author emphasizes the importance of organizational decentralization, sharing (not hiding) of knowledge through networks and other contextual arrangements that allow creativity to flourish. These are strategies without which a modern corporation cannot survive since the speed of innovation is constantly accelerating.

These kinds of arrangements are founded on nation-wide policies that support investment in research and development and strengthen the co-operation, strategic alliances and networking between corporations, the state, universities and individual innovators. One case in which such a development has succeeded is Finland, an example

of a network society that “offers some hope for countries currently stagnating at a much lower level of development around the world” (Castells and Himanen 2002, 169).

In many passages of *The Information Age* as well as in numerous recent writings, Castells is enthusiastic about the new informational economy and those individuals and groups who best embody the “spirit of informationalism”. Speaking again about the Finnish success story, Castells and Himanen write about friction between two cultural dispositions among Finns towards recent socio-economic developments. One of them is the traditional protestant ethic that supports hard work and rejects stock market-based prosperity. The other is the culture of the new economy and option-millionaires, who act globally and display their wealth by conspicuous consumption of sports cars and other signs of material success. This bipolarity leads to social confrontations, but luckily there is “a promising third group”, namely “hackers” who “want to do something that they feel passionate about and in which they can realize themselves creatively, and this is their primary motivation and not the maximization of money. Hackers represent the culture of information creation without the extreme capitalism that is a dividing force in society” (Castells and Himanen 2002, 160–161).

Despite these upbeat notes, the society as a whole is far from being harmonious in Castells’s estimation. Castells connects a discussion of transformations in work and employment to his economic analysis; by so doing, he also comments on social divisions of the network society.

Here we can quickly run through Castells’s arguments since they are, as he himself notes, “technically less complex” (Castells 2004a, 157). Castells claims that work and employment, like almost everything else, are also substantially transformed in the network society. For him, the issue is not mass unemployment because of automation and new information technologies, but rather, “the development of flexible work, as the predominant form of working arrangements” (Castells 2000c, 11). As noted, the network economy is based on projects and this, together with other recent organizational trends (such as off-shoring, outsourcing and downsizing) results in the general individualization of the labour force. We face “the end of stable employment in the same company, of a predictable career pattern for the rest of your life, which has been the prevailing mode of employment during the industrial age” (Castells 2004c, 157).

This has massive effects on relations between capital and labor. Because of the individualization of labour, globalization of production and informationalization of the economy, the working class everywhere loses its collective identity and bargaining power – and with this, the era of production-based class conflict slowly but surely comes to an end, replaced by politics of identity and struggles waged by the so-called new social movements. At the same time, Castells (2000a, 505) writes of the end of the capitalist class as a stratum of society, as its place is taken by a “faceless collective capital, made up of financial flows operated by electronic networks”. This does not mean that the power relationship between capital and labour ceases to exist altogether, but that the question of “who are the owners, who are the producers, who are the managers, and who the servants becomes increasingly blurred in a production system of variable geometry, of teamwork, of networking, outsourcing and subcontracting” (ibid., 506).



The interests of capital remain operative in the network society, but they are not expressions of class interests (reducible in the end to the question of who owns property and who does not). Instead of this, Castells explains that the processes of socio-economic restructuring in the 1980s and beyond (executed by conservative governments and free-market doctrinaires) took place not primarily because of class-based motivations but by the force of the new network morphology. It compels social actors from above, so to speak (see especially Castells 2000a, 147). Power resides now in the network itself, in “the bare logic of capital flows” (Castells 2000a, 507). According to Castells, the persons who run and manage the networks and flows (“networkers”, “informational labor”, “symbolic analysts” etc.) are the primary – in terms of their strategic importance – workforce of the new informational society, despite the fact that these people are not necessarily those with most capital in their hands, such as investors or owners. They are also the carriers of the “spirit of informationalism” which is, as noted, a cultural force evidently more important for Castells than a purely economic motivation for making profit.

Basing himself on these ideas, Castells (2000c, 12) is ready to draw a map of social division in the network society: “Labour is fundamentally divided in two categories: self-programmable labour, and generic labour”. The first group is flexible, able “to retrain itself, and adapt to new tasks”. In contrast to this, the second group is “exchangeable and disposable, and co-exists in the same circuits which machines and with unskilled labour from around the world”. Beyond these two groups that are employable, there are masses of irrelevant people that do not contribute to the new economy. These “devalued people” can be, if they are lucky enough, exploited by “fringe capitalist businesses” and global criminal networks, operating in the drug business and prostitution, for instance. Here it should be noted, again, that the main analytic principle is not the polarity between the propertied and the propertyless classes, but between those who are “networkers” and those who are “switched off” (ibid., 18).

Social divisions are thus huge in the network society, and Castells does not shy away from describing their devastating effects. He (2000b, 166–167) speaks of the ways in which globalization proceeds by “including and excluding segments of economies and societies” and how it is characterized by worker exploitation that cannot be corrected either by unions or the state. The latter has even become, in parts of Latin America and Africa, a “predator of its own people” (ibid., 167). Thus we can witness “black holes of the informational capitalism” where “there is no escape from the pain and destruction inflicted on the human condition for those who, in one way or another, enter these social landscapes” (ibid., 165). However, the reasons why “people, and locales, enter these black holes is less important than what happens afterwards” (ibid., 165–166). By this, Castells refers to reproduction of social exclusion through stigmatization of the poor and insufficient provision of education.

Castells writes in a manner that makes it clear that he finds some amount of exploitation to be unavoidable – we can only argue about “necessary” versus “unnecessary” levels of it. Therefore, as Castells sees that the material reproduction of the social system as a whole is based on the logic of “creative destruction” with all the socio-economic effects that follow from it, he is forced to look outside the realm of the economic for corrective



mechanisms. While Castells writes that the economic conditions that prevail globally in the network society are exceedingly difficult to overcome politically, insofar as we discuss “its main tenets” (Castells 2000a, 147), he places his hopes of overcoming the “extreme” features of capitalist globalization in the emergence of new information and communication technologies. From this observation we can turn to the importance of media and communications in Castells’s *Zeitdiagnose*.

### 4.3 Castells’s views on Media and Communications

“Communication, because of the kind of society we are in, has become the core field of social sciences at large”, Castells notes in a recent interview (Rantanen 2005c, 146). While this remark is undoubtedly motivated by its appearance in a media studies journal, we should not doubt the underlying interest that the author has in the topic. Because of the overall theoretical scheme of Castells’s trilogy, analysis of the media and communications occupy a pivotal place in it. But what kind of a place? The problem in answering this question lies in the fact that it is exceedingly hard to distinguish this topic as a separate issue in Castells’s work. It is elementarily connected to the main argument according to which the global economy, the society, and the culture are thoroughly networked and informationalized. Especially due to the rise of new forms of electronic communication technologies, the media and communications are not seen by Castells as just one element of society. Instead, they now form the very essence of society and culture. The world has undergone an “information technology revolution” (Castells 2000a, 28ff), which has impacted on all levels of social structure and human action. It also affects the way in which we understand contemporary forms of social communication.

To use the standard Marxist vocabulary, the media and communications are equally parts of the base as they are parts of the superstructure for Castells – or in reality, he argues that today there is no difference to be made between these categories, rendering them devoid of analytical value. Castells (2000a, 26) does “not share a traditional view of society as made up of superimposed levels, with technology and economy in the basement, power on the mezzanine, and culture in the penthouse”. Instead, he emphasizes a new “mode of development”, i.e., “informationalism”, which changes the face of capitalism via the fact that now “technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication” (ibid., 17) are sources for increasing productivity. Furthermore, since “informationalism is based on the technology of knowledge and information, there is an especially close linkage between culture and productive forces, between spirit and matter” (ibid., 17–18). This is an influential version of the argument that suggests the general “culturalization” of the economy and which singles out communications as focal forces of production.

Its importance notwithstanding, this forms only the starting point for Castells’s analysis of media and communications that he presents in the pages of *The Information Age*. As was noted above, Castells has many things to say about this topic. On one occasion, he notes that students of the media should nowadays look

at “the transformation of the media system by the combined forces of digitalization, globalization, and media business concentration, in the context of an increasingly independent-minded audience” (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 146). This would suggest that Castells has a theoretical interest in all of the approaches to media discussed in Chapter three: medium theory, cultural studies as well as political economic analysis of the media. Castells analysis of media and communications is indeed ambitious. Besides his broad interest in developments that point to many possible areas of media research, it should be remembered here that Castells’s recent work is always related to the question of power and domination – not just an explication of social and cultural tendencies but criticism of them. This is something that Castells also aims at in his discussion of media and communications (as do all the other theorists that I discuss in the following Chapters).

Largely dissatisfied with Castells’s sociological diagnoses, Garnham (2004a, 165) argues that his model of network society is “a theory of communication massively presenting itself as both a way of understanding the present historical moment and the dominant development trends in society and at the same times as the favoured legitimating ideology for the dominant economic and political powerholders”. Is this a justified characterization? Prior to an evaluation of this question, we will have to go through Castells’s views on media and communications more fully. I will compartmentalize my review of this subject in three sections: the first clarifies the distinction between information and communication technologies in Castells’s work; the second looks at how the concept of “space of flows”, which is “fundamental” for Castells, relates to media and communications; and in the third one, I discuss Castells’s historical analysis of them, especially the way in which he considers the change from mass media culture to a new media sphere. Of course, as the author is working with a theory that is unified in its formulations, all of these sections touch common issues. The main point, however, is to cover the key dimensions of Castells’s analyses of media and communication systematically.

### Information versus Communication Technologies

In Chapter 3, I referred to the problem of how to distinguish between the concepts of the media and new information technologies. This question is pertinent today because of the shift from what has been called the “broadcast era” towards “post-broadcast media” (Hartley 2002, 181). I will deal with this again in a short while (as this shift is important for Castells as well). However, there is also an additional conceptual issue in the context of Castells’s work, namely, the distinction between new information technologies and communication technologies. As has become clear from the earlier sections, Castells puts information technologies on the pedestal as the new material foundation of the economy and the society. For him, information technology is a wide concept; in general, he refers with it to “the converging set of technologies in micro-electronics, computing (machines and software), telecommunications/broadcasting, and opto-electronics. In addition, unlike some analysts, I also include in the realm of information technologies

genetic engineering and its expanding set of developments and applications” (Castells 2000a, 29).

However, there is something peculiar to communication technologies in Castells’s framework. As he soon adds, “unlike any other revolution, *the core* of the transformation we are experiencing in the current revolution refers to *technologies of information processing and communication*” (Castells 2000a, 30). While we should make a distinction between Castells’s generalist or inclusivist use of the concept “information technology”, he refers by the concept mostly to communication technologies, which are based on the digital flow of information and symbols (Heiskala 2004, 49). Writing about the internet, which is a key topic for Castells, he claims that “the New economy [...] is an economy in which companies – or firms or entrepreneurs – around the world are working on the basis of Internet”, and that “Internet is the electricity of the Information Age” (Castells 2004c, 150).

One important theoretical foundation for such remarks is the theory of post-industrialism, developed by various authors since the 1950s (Colin Clarke, Alain Touraine, Daniel Bell). Recognizing this inheritance, Castells points to the master triad of human social evolution suggested by this school: the route from pre-industrialism to industrialism to what Castells now calls informationalism. These are historically variable modes of development, but according to Castells, the latter must be singled out as exceptional. “I contend”, he writes (2000c, 10), that the new information technologies “represent a greater change in the history of technology than the technologies associated with the Industrial revolution, or with the previous Information Revolution (printing)”. Why is this so?

The answer offered by Castells is that while all technologies that have hitherto instigated a “revolution” are “characterized by their pervasiveness, that is by their penetration of all domains of human activity”, the pervasiveness of information technology is of a different kind. “New information technologies are not simply tools to be applied, but processes to be developed”. Because of this, “for the first time in history, the human mind is a direct productive force, not just a decisive element in the production system”. They are “technologies to act on information, not just information to act on technology, as was the case in previous technological revolutions”. Other merits that Castells mentions are that the new information technologies operate on a networking logic that offers the possibility for flexibility in production processes. Thus “organizations and institutions can be modified, and even fundamentally altered” so that more complex and more fluid patterns of production and interaction can be developed in a world characterized by incessant competition and change. Finally, the network information technology paradigm creates a “*convergence of specific technologies into a highly integrated system*, within which old, separate technological trajectories become literally indistinguishable” (Castells 2000a, 29–31, 70–72).

Change is in the air in these powerful formulations. Castells (2000a, 32) notes that “new information technologies have spread throughout the globe with lightning speed in less than two decades, between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s”, “connecting the world” in a more fundamental sense than was the case with previous technological revolutions. Castells proposes (ibid., 30) that the new technologies of media and

communications are of different nature compared to the old, although he, of course, offers also some necessary caveats. I will come back to the issue of the technological specificity of new electronic communications in a separate section that targets the ways in which Castells views the change of broadcast media, and also in the evaluative section that ends this Chapter.

### The Media and Communications and the Space(s) of Flows

The space (or spaces) of flows is one of Castells's most important conceptual novelties. As I have argued above, the theoretical ideas that lie behind this concept is also what connects Castells's work to academic globalization theory most intimately. Here, I want to expand on this concept so that its links to communications becomes more evident and in order to expand on other themes that are crucial for Castells and which are based on the idea of space(s) of flows.

Castells notes that "the most difficult concept to grasp of my whole theory is the space of flows. Yet, it is fundamental [...] because I believe it is the most direct expression of the technological transformation of our existence" (Castells and Ince 2003, 55–56). He continues:

"Throughout history in most human practice, simultaneity depended on vicinity, on territorial proximity. Now, what happens when we can do things together in real time, but from very distant locations? There is simultaneity, but the spatial arrangement that allows it is a different one. It is based on telecommunications, computer systems, and the places from where this interaction takes place. This is the space of flows: not just the electronic/ telecommunications circuits, but the network of places that are connected via these electric circuits and their ancillary systems." (Ibid., 56)

Now, in a general sense, this not different from what is commonly claimed by mainstream academic globalization theorists who are similarly fascinated by spatio-temporal shifts. Giddens's "time-space distanciation" and "action at a distance", or Scholte's notion of "transworld simultaneity" work on the same conceptual level. All such expressions understand globalization as a process whereby social relations are disengaged from the restrictions of time and space and a former "territorial logic" is bypassed by a global networking logic that is materially supported by media and communications.

Besides stating the coming of spaces of flows, that is to say, networks that connect places as a matter of theoretical concern, Castells is interested in analyzing its human consequences. In terms of the media and communications, he discusses the effect of the logic of networks and flows in relation to two themes: a) politics and power and b) culture and identity, both of which are discussed in the volumes two and three of *The Information Age*.

I will repeat here again Castells' argument that in the network society "the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power". In his analytical delineation of what power is, Castells (2000c, 3) notes, first, that it "is the action of humans on other humans to impose their will on others", either through symbolic or physical violence. Continuing with this familiar sociological explication, Castells (*ibid.*) maintains that "institutions of society [especially the state] are built to enforce power relationships", often through physical violence but also through symbolic violence, which "increases in importance over time, as societies make progress in establishing institutional limits to the arbitrary exercise of physical violence". From this the author (*ibid.*, 19) moves to discuss the fundamentals of domination in the new network society:

"The most direct impact of information networks on social structure concerns power relationships. Historically, power was embedded in organizations and institutions, organized around a hierarchy of centres. Networks dissolve centres, they disorganize hierarchy, and make materially impossible the exercise of hierarchical power without processing instructions in the network, according to the network's morphological rules. Thus, contemporary information networks of capital, production, trade, science, communication, human rights, and crime, bypass the nation-state, which, by and large, has stopped being a sovereign entity, as I argued above. A similar process, in different ways, takes place in other hierarchical organizations that used to embody power ('power apparatuses' in the old Marxist terminology), such as churches, schools, hospitals, bureaucracies of all kinds."

Finally, we need to note the precise meaning of the "network's morphological rules". Elsewhere, Castells (2004a, 425) explains them by adding a communicational twist to the concept of power, in ways that are in line with his totalistic explanation: "The new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behaviour". This feature of the network society has a domineering ring to it, for "all kinds of messages in the new type of society work in a binary mode: presence/absence in the multimedia communication system" and therefore, "the price to pay for inclusion in the system is to adapt to its logic, to its language, to its points of entry, to its encoding and decoding" (Castells 2000a, 405).

If we were to single out key social theorists who operate with a similar idea of domination, Michel Foucault and Guy Debord come to mind here. Similar to Foucault (whose influence he mentions in passing), Castells sees power as a diffuse and capillary phenomenon, something that is not identifiable as these or those institutions or collectives. While Castells might cringe at Foucault's anti-humanism, his thoughts on domination have similar tragic aspects: for both of them, power is an inescapable fact of social life to which subjects have to adapt. Foucault's Nietzschean nihilism is well known, but it is existent also in Castells (2004a, 425), who speaks of "eternal" power that "still shapes, and dominates us [...] because humans are, and will be, predators".

This is, however, only one part of Castells's concept of power. The difference between Foucault and Castells consists in the fact that for the former, power is a meta-physical fact of life, while Castells attaches it more materially to the virtuality of the network. Thus, for Foucault, there is no "outside" of power/knowledge, but for Castells there is, though with a "price to pay": i.e., the social and political death of the non-networked subject.

The second aspect of Castells's view on domination is closely related to the notion of the society of the spectacle of Debord (1994). This is evident in Castells's (2004a, 367ff) analysis of mediated politics. There is fairly little here in substance that is not familiar for media students and researchers, so I will enumerate Castells' points rapidly.

Beginning (after some caveats) with the claim that "outside the sphere of the media there is only political marginality" (Castells 2004a, 370), Castells proceeds to explore the connections between the media and politics, mostly in the most informationalized nations. He notes that people are dependent on the media, especially television, and its images in forming their public opinion. Politicians, on the other hand, are dependent on the media for publicity. Discussing the example of the United States, Castells notes that the principles which they have to follow there are dictated by the commercial news media which require entertaining, clear-cut and personified political stories that lack ambivalence but not human interest. Sound-bites, drama, rivalries, greed, "and if possible, sex and violence", are the order of the day in mediated politics (ibid., 379). This leads to the oversimplification of political messages, which Castells fears will happen also in the European context: "while institutions, culture, and history make European politics highly specific, technology, globalization, and the network society incite political actors and institutions to engage in technology driven, informational politics" (ibid., 386). The manipulative and cynical nature of "informational politics" has been one factor, according to the author, of "the crisis of democracy", i.e., the disaffection with the political system, political parties and the concurrent decline in voting percentages in national elections (ibid., 402–414).

In keeping with his idea of domination, Castells claims that economic influence does not translate into control of the media and, subsequently, politics. The lesson of Silvio Berlusconi's political and business affairs and his problems with public image before his first political downfall in the mid-1990s is a case in point for Castells (1997, 341–342; see also Castells 2004a, 400–402). It shows that mediated politics is a turbulent kind of politics: "today's hunter is tomorrow's game" in the world of politics of scandal and character assassinations where, "as in other domains of the network society, the power of flows overwhelms the flows of power" (ibid., 400, 402).

This conclusion, while based on very real tendencies, is, in my view, probably too neat of a crystallization: it subsumes the topic in question to Castells's general model in a contrived way, lacking specificity and critical engagement. In light of Berlusconi's later activities, we might also question the relevance of Castells's comments on his political career as well as the larger lessons that he draws from them. After all, Berlusconi was – as Castells (2004a, 401) notes in the second, revised edition of *The Power of Identity* – elected again in 2001 and 2008 to head the Italian government, despite all the blunders and scandals that have littered his career in the public eye. Even though

Castells mentions this fact, he does not think that it necessitates a reconsideration of his substantive conclusions, such as, for instance, the argument that “the political system [has become] engulfed in the endless turbulence of media reporting [...] and scandal-making” (Castells 2004a, 402). Here we might want to take a pause to think about the question of how detrimental “media-scandals” are to “the political system” as a whole. While such scandals no doubt feed political cynicism among the voters and result in occasional falls from grace of leading politicians, this does not necessarily mean that media flows “overwhelm” established forms of political power, such as the domination of politics (and publicity) by long-standing economic and political elites.

I will continue with this line of criticism after a short while from a broad theoretical viewpoint. For the moment, I want to add another layer to Castells’s notion of spaces of flows. This has to do with his view of culture and identity. Starting with this theme, we should first note the distinction that Castells makes between places and networks. The meaning of “spaces of flows” is not that there would be something like a “spaceless place”. More realistically than when he quite mysteriously declares the establishment of “timeless time”, Castells (2000a, 443) notes that the network “is not placeless, although its structural logic is”. No “place exists by itself, since the positions are defined by the exchanges of flows in the network. Thus, the network of communication is the fundamental spatial configuration: places do not disappear, but their logic and their meaning becomes absorbed in the network” (ibid., 442–443).

What this means in cultural terms is a challenge to collective identity, as “our societies have become globally interconnected and culturally intertwined” (Castells 2004a, 3). For Castells, culture has primarily two meanings. On the one hand, there is the fragmented but dominating cultural form of virtual flows and mediated symbolic expressions moved and captured by the network (I will discuss this in more detail soon). On the other hand, he emphasizes culture as a communal entity, based on traditions and common destiny. Between these two, a battleground is opened, where struggles over identity are being fought. In the decades leading to the contemporary period, “we have experienced [...] the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control of their own lives and environment” (Castells 2004a, 2).

We can notice a clear dualism in Castells’s model of culture in the information age. Collective identity is important for Castells (2004a, 7) in an analytic sense, for he claims that it offers stronger sources of meaning for actors than their social roles. He underwrites the importance of “identity politics” in a distinctive way. For him, collective identity is anchored in places, collective memories and a feeling of common purpose; they give coherence to subjects, primary meanings that are “self-sustaining across time and space” (ibid.). There is, then, something eminently powerful in collective identity that resists its incorporation to the universalist logic of the network. This occurs both in the good and in the bad sense: resistance movements against globalization may be formed so as to maintain regressive values, insulation from the world outside and domination by paternal authority figures, but equally, they may promote progressive causes. In both cases, Castells claims, the search for meaning is based on “communal principles” and “communal resistance” (ibid., 11). After outlining these theses, Castells



moves on to discuss various kinds of religious fundamentalisms, nationalisms, ethnically subordinated groups, insurgents, militarist patriots, cults and political movements as examples.

With these ideas in mind, Castells's thinking on culture and identity takes distance from two perspectives that abound in academic globalization theory. First, he criticizes what he considers as overtly constructionist positions on nations. For instance, he criticizes Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" – which is central for postmodern cultural studies views of national identity – on the grounds that collective identities are in fact based on shared experiences, expressive of emotionally laden ties to "a shared history and a shared project" (Castells 2004a, 32).<sup>7</sup> Secondly, he does not share Giddens' trust in the transfiguring power of self-reflexive subjects for the reason that there is a "disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals", so that "reflexive life-planning becomes impossible except for the elite inhabiting the timeless space of flows of global networks" (ibid., 11). Whereas Giddens grounds the psychic sustenance of the modern self on an "ontological security" that is based on nurture, routines and trust – from which reflexivity may spring up in the chaotic context of high modernity – Castells grounds the sense of continuity and order on communal feelings. He cites Robert Bellah (1985, 286) approvingly in the process: "individuals need the nurture of groups that carry a moral tradition reinforcing their own aspirations".

Thus Castells paradigm is a far cry from the idea of cosmopolitanism that is the organizing and liberating principle for many globalization theorists when they discuss identity and culture. Although Castells does not link his discussion to cultural studies, we can say that he is not in agreement with poststructuralist theories of identity that celebrate *différance* and displaced meanings. Castells's ethos and method is directly communitarian: communities offer the protective cocoon for individuals "against a hostile, outside world" (Castells 2004a, 68).

Let us integrate media and communications into this perspective. The way in which Castells does this is again dualistic. It is captured in a basic form by his remark that

7 While it is true that Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities" refers to a set of cultural constructions around nations and nationalisms, Castells's critique of this particular concept sounds overblown. It is hard to understand why the notion of imagined communities would somehow constitute, as Castells claims, an "assault on the very concept of nations" or that it represents the idea "that nations are pure ideological artefacts", like in Ernest Gellner's conception of nations as "arbitrary historical inventions" created by the elites for their own benefit (Castells 2004a, 30–32). After all, Anderson is not out to dismiss the concept of nation or nationalism but to redefine it as an "imagined political community". In those communities, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship", capable of producing shared sentiments such as the willingness "to die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson 1983, 7). This is hardly much different from Castells's statement that shared national projects are based on "historical narratives built on experience [...] common to the people of each country on many grounds". In other words, together with Anderson, Castells seems to agree that for "a shared project" to appear, it needs to be anchored in discourses that give "explanations" for common experiences. Furthermore, Anderson (ibid., 4), although referring to imagined communities as "cultural artefacts", does not treat them as ideological artefacts in the sense that they would serve elites alone, writing instead that they are produced by a "distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces [...] capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains", including a "wide variety of political and ideological constellations". On the grounds of these arguments alone, there is no reason to believe that Anderson would have been "surprised" that in the so-called global age nationalisms are resurgent, as Castells implies (see also a recent interview of Anderson by Khazaleh 2005). I suspect that Castells's loose treatment of Anderson's influential concept is based on the palpable communitarian aspects of his thinking, which I point out in this Chapter.



because “the new processes of domination to which people react are embedded in information flows, the building of autonomy has to rely on reverse information flows” (Castells 2004a, 69). The communal resistance of Mexico’s *Zapatistas* in the 1990s – who used the internet successfully to build up a “worldwide network of solidarity groups” (ibid., 83) – is an example of this argument in Castells’s work. Similarly, Castells (ibid., 186–187) points out that environmental grassroots groups throughout the world take action by organizing situationist media events and feeding spectacular images that catch the attention of journalists. In this way, the networking logic is shown to be all-encompassing, but at times also empowering, provided that the actors are capable enough.

Yet, for Castells, the meaning of identity and autonomy in the cultural realm of the network society is more perplexing than this. Subjects are not resisting the whole time or continuously engaging themselves with socially energetic communal activities, to say the least. What are the consequences? This issue comes forward in Castells’s (2000a, 385ff) discussion of the internet and the media sphere in the first volume. Here the tone of his voice fluctuates between communitarian optimism and pessimism, with the accent falling on the former mood. On the one hand, he refers to studies that discuss the fragmentation and individualization of human experience in the new media sphere. On the other hand, however, the internet provides us with an “interactive society” which may not be such a loss to communal attachments after all. Castells (ibid., 388–389) notes that while the internet typically facilitates only “weak ties” among people, these still establish “a fundamental layer of social interaction” for them. Even more so, the virtual communities of the internet are not a world apart from real communities, since they “generate reciprocity and support” and they assist in the development of “social networks around the individual [...] both physically and on-line” (ibid., 389), especially if the individuals are separated by great distances.

Castells’s discussion of virtual communities is therefore regulated by his communitarian understanding of identity. Community, for him, is ideally constituted by centred subjects, who are in intimate and lasting relations with each other. He assumes, in terms similar to those of Howard Rheingold (1993), that the uses of computer-mediated communications are motivated by “the hunger for community that has followed from the disintegration of traditional communities around the world” (ibid., 62). This is very different from a poststructuralist analysis of the same theme. For Mark Poster (1995), the real emancipatory tendency of the “second media age” lies in the “new opportunities for reconstructing the mechanisms of subject constitution” (ibid., 19) via the “immense potentialities for fantasy, self-discovery and self-construction” that are opened up by virtual machines (ibid., 39). “This is an important basis for the instability of identity in electronic communications” (ibid., 38). Castells would have none of this and in turn, Poster would in all likelihood charge him with essentialism.

Despite the challenges that they present, Castells ends up being reservedly optimist in terms of the impact of new information technologies. For all of their potential downsides in cultural terms, they are a material fact, offering a chance to renew communal bonds in an otherwise individualizing society. This type of reasoning refers to Castells’s versatility as an analyst of media technologies and their cultural

implications. The precursor to such ideas in media theory goes back to American pragmatists of the early twentieth century (such as John Dewey), who also were interested in media as means which could ameliorate the negative tendencies that a shift from small local communities to a “great society” had caused. They hoped that modern media would help to build up a “great community” characterized by shared goals and mutual sympathy. However, the realist foundation for such hopes lies not in media and communication technologies themselves, but in their social setting. Could it then be that the real distinction is not between “space of flows” and more communally inhabited “space of places”, as Castells claims, or between the Net and the Self, but in some other distinction that is not reducible to a spatio-temporal or technological framework? I will come back to this question in my critique at the end of this Chapter.

#### From Mass Media to the Culture of Real Virtuality

The final aspect of Castells’s analysis of media and communications that I want to take up is his conception of their historical development and their overall cultural impact. The following review is based mainly on chapter 5 of the first volume of his trilogy, which is the most lengthy section of those in which he discusses this topic. I will not go through all the details and subplots that Castells offers, since my interest lies, as also was the case in the above discussion, in the main arguments that he presents and the theoretical ideas that guide them.

Castells (2000a, 355–356) starts his chapter on media with a medium-theoretical summary of the development of human civilization (see Meyrowitz 1994, 53–58). Castells may be characterized, as he himself claims, as an “explorer” of contemporary trends, but here he clearly follows a pre-drawn map. The influence of Marshall McLuhan is notable throughout the chapter. It is also acknowledged by Castells, when he notes that he considers McLuhan “a genius” (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 142). This is no wonder, given the parallels of their thought, fusing together communitarianism and modern media technologies. Comparing contemporary advances in media and communication technology to the invention of the alphabet, Castells (2000a, 356) emphasizes “the integration of various modes of communication into an interactive network” that occurs now “for the first time in history”, a development that “we can hardly undermine [in] its significance”.

Recycling McLuhan’s gnomic style and technological naturalism, Castells (2000a, 356) proposes a grand synthesis that takes place not only in the technological apparatus but also inside the human psyche: “The human spirit reunites its dimensions in a new interaction between the two sides of the brain, machines, and social contexts”. McLuhan’s choice of words was more psychedelic (he spoke of the same thing as “regaining our Wholeness [...] on a cosmic plane”, cited in Czitrom 1982, 174), but the same underlying story is recounted by both of them: a return to a more sensory unified communications environment after nearly 3000 years of domination of literacy and emotional detachment. In a way similar to that in which McLuhan claimed in 1955 that “the new media are not bridges between man and nature; they are nature” (ibid.),

Castells (2000a, 362) sees the new media of our time as more than just windows onto the world; they constitute “the fabric of our lives. We live with the media and by the media.”

Continuing in this vein, Castells (2000a, 364) claims that our existence is mediated through and through. The “media, and particularly audiovisual media in our culture, are indeed the basic material of communication processes. We live in a media environment, and most of our symbolic stimuli come from the media”. They are even “the most important part of our live”, since they “build our imaginary” (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 141). It is not merely any kind of media, however. While noting that “television still dominates the social critique of mass media” (Castells 2000a, 356), Castells writes that the “emergence of a new electronic communication system characterized by its global reach, its integration of all communication media, and its potential interactivity is changing and will change forever our culture” (ibid., 357).

I think this suffices to demonstrate the high premium that Castells places on the media and communications in terms of the culture of the Information Age. As late as 1994, British sociologist John B. Thompson expressed his regrets that the media had not “received the attention they deserve” in sociology (Thompson 1994, 27) – just as Castells was about to remedy that situation in earnest, although not single-handedly: the media and communications are prominently present in currently fashionable theories of “second modernity”, prompting a general mediatization of social theory (see section 7.3).

Next, Castells takes a step back and looks at the rise of mass media culture or what he calls “the McLuhan Galaxy” centred around the television.<sup>8</sup> Here Castells’s main theme is the ideological power of mass media which he disputes. He notes the pervasiveness of television in the post-World War Two culture, but he denies its impact on social behaviour and its ideological efficacy, citing Umberto Eco’s critique of “apocalyptic critics of mass communications” (i.e., the Frankfurt School) and their allegedly simplistic view of “people as passive receptacles of ideological manipulation” (Castells 2000a, 363). This recalls the liberal media sociology of the 1950s, which took issue with theories of mass culture, as well as similar-minded “theories of the interactive audience” from the 1980s and 1990s, which Castells cites as another fundamental influence on his thinking (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 144). Today, the social power of the media is undermined also because of the technology itself. According to Castells, the most important “effect” of the new media environment is that it relativizes and normalizes meanings that become “instantly obsolete” as they are “reprocessed by a myriad of different views and alternative codes” (ibid.) with the help of the internet. Thus, the “only shared meaning is the meaning of sharing the network” (ibid.).

8 The metaphor of galaxy is one of Castells’s favourites. He named his later book on the web “*The Internet Galaxy*” (Castells 2001). The metaphor of galaxy is suggestive of a vast totality, comprised of billions of individual entities joined together by centrifugal forces of gravity that also command the movement of the whole constellation. But it is also fuzzy on the edges and only comprehensible in its shape when looked at from a great distance that erases individual details. As the metaphor of galaxy is borrowed from the natural sciences, I wonder how much it can be of use in describing social reality. Is it too much to suggest that Castells’s technological determinism – something which he vehemently denies and which needs to be discussed more (see pages 144ff) – shines through precisely in his choice of words, in this case via the links that he forges between celestial mechanics and human social communication?

In fact, for Castells, the social impact of an earlier media, television, also “works on the binary mode: to be or not to be” (Castells 2000a, 364). There are, then, similarities between the social logic of mass media of the 1960s and 1970s and the new media sphere of the 1990s and beyond. However, in his discussion of recent developments, Castells highlights the fragmentation and de-massification of social communication, including the former mass media, arguing (*ibid.*, 370) that instead of the coming of a “global village”, we are entering more individualized “customized cottages”. This, together with the emergence of computer-mediated-communication, opens up political opportunities in Castells’s estimation. Because of the importance of this theme, I will discuss and evaluate it more conclusively in the final section (evaluation).

The above points provide a relatively comprehensive overview of what Castells has to say about media and communications in the trilogy; clearly, his effort is not insignificant. The chapter ends up with an introduction and description of the notion of “the culture of real virtuality”. However, as he has already exhausted his empirical and theoretical reservoirs, this credo is, with all due respect to the important themes that Castells has raised, an anti-climax. It basically revisits the idea that we now effectively live in a media/communications culture. Curiously, however, Castells (2000a, 403) now feels the need to propose that

“all forms of communication [...] are based on the production and consumption of signs. Thus there is no separation between ‘reality’ and symbolic representation. In all societies humankind has existed in and acted through symbolic environment [...] [Reality] has always been virtual because it is always perceived through symbols that frame practice with some meaning that escapes their strict semantic definition”.

This is curious in light of Castells’s earlier criticism of postmodern theorization; indeed, it seems to go against the grain of his work. Castells writes that there is no point in criticizing media by claiming that it does not represent “reality”, because there is no “‘uncoded’ real experience”. Followed literally, these remarks would cancel Castells’s own criticisms of mediated politics devoid of real substance: why would we be interested in criticizing the manufacturing of images if behind them are no other, more fundamental levels? If a recourse to reality is “an absurdly primitive notion” that has never made sense, what is then the novelty of the new virtual media culture? Castells claims that we are now “fully immersed in a virtual image setting”, where “appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience” (Castells 2000a, 404).

What is the meaning of this? Having been relatively cautious in his framing of what the cultural consequences of the development of new media and communication technologies are, suddenly Castells does a full-blown Baudrillard impersonation. There is sense in his emphasis that “the most important feature of multimedia is that they capture within their domain most cultural expressions, in all their diversity” (Castells 2000a, 403); but it is another thing to say that “people’s material/symbolic existence [...] is entirely captured” (*ibid.*, 404) by the new communications system. Ending the

act with what seems to be a deep confusion, Castells exits the stage and we are left with the need to reflect on his ideas.

#### 4.4 Evaluation

Castells's trilogy easily reckons among the most well-considered analyses of recent social, economic, political and cultural trends. In general, his treatment of the media and communications also contains insights and touches substantial themes that are of interest to media researchers and theorists. It is worthy of commentary for this reason alone, but also for the huge success of the trilogy as a publication that strikes a balance between thick academic prose and adept popularization. In all probability, more people with or without academic credentials have read about the society-wide and change-inducing properties of new media and communications technology from the pages of Castells's trilogy than from a book by a genuine media research specialist (with a possible exception of Marshall McLuhan some thirty years earlier, who is, as noted, a key influence for Castells).

In evaluating Castells's main ideas concerning media and communications, I will keep in mind that his work reflects key points in the way in which this subject has been approached in current academic globalization research. The criticism that I present is immanent in its nature. Immanent criticism in this context means that one offers critical analysis of a certain body of work by using and referring to the same categories, standpoints and orientations that are inherently present in it. Castells has stated very clearly that he is above all interested in "social change, power relations and technology" (in Rantanen 2005c, 138). This, in addition to his interest in social movements, politics, democracy and economic equality, puts his work squarely within the realm of critical theory and emancipatory social science, stemming both from the Enlightenment philosophy and academic Marxism (see Garnham 2004a, 165; Stevenson 1999, 175). Castells finds the latter tradition highly problematic, but nonetheless, he acknowledges that his interest areas are "all Marxist concerns" (in Rantanen 2005c, 138).

Thus, I will evaluate Castells's views on media and communications from a perspective of critical theory and emancipatory social science. Castells situates his work against both shallow futurologist punditry and the postmodern turn in social and cultural sciences (in a manner that is worth quoting at length):

"culture and thinking in our time often embrace a new millenarianism. Prophets of technology preach the new age, extrapolating to social trends and organization the barely understood logic of computers, and DNA. Postmodern culture, and theory, indulge in celebrating the end of history, and, to some extent, the end of reason, giving up on our capacity to understand and make sense, even of nonsense. The implicit assumption is the acceptance of full individualization of behaviour, and of society's powerlessness over its destiny. The project informing this book swims against streams of destruction, and takes exception to various forms of

intellectual nihilism, social skepticism, and political cynicism. I believe in rationality, and the possibility of calling upon reason without worshipping its goddess. I believe in the chances of meaningful social action, and transformative politics, without necessarily drifting toward the deadly rapids of absolute utopias. I believe in the liberating power of identity, without accepting the necessity of either its individualization or its capture by fundamentalism. And I propose the hypothesis that all major trends of change constituting our new, confusing world are related, and that we can make sense of their interrelationship. And yes, I believe that in spite of a long tradition of sometimes tragic intellectual errors, that observing, analyzing, and theorizing are a way of helping to build a different, better world." (Castells 2000a, 4)

With this declaration, Castells calls for the upholding of the Enlightenment as an unfinished project, tainted but not destroyed by various forms of unreason (on the part of the elites, the intellectuals and the lay actors). He wants social theory to be on the side of emancipation. Similarly, he believes in progress and in the openness of history, although he is not a progressivist in some unreconstructed manner. This is typical for Castells: he tries to oscillate between different paradigms, so that he cannot be criticized for being a determinist in this or that sense; he presents a wealth of statistical data to support his arguments; he gives examples that underline the main points, but is also careful enough to notice the existence of counterexamples and exceptions to the rule. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Castells is an intellectual artisan of the highest order and there is no point in dismissing his work, even if assessed critically, with a light sweep.

Yet I think that one should not lose one's critical faculties in the face of Castells's eminent analyses. Despite his lucid mode of presentation, Castells is highly elusive in certain (fully intentional) respects. If one so wishes, one can read him as a representative of very different trains of thought. Reading selectively, his work would seem to stand equally for, say, European third-way neoliberalism (embodied by Tony Blair's New Labour, whose policies Castells admired) or, alternatively, deeply concerned criticism of markets as the organizing principle of the society (something which pleases the ears of so-called anti-globalists). Castells seems to have it all, and he is quick to reverse the thrust of his arguments if they are in danger of drifting towards too evident positions.

Consequently, easy labels will get us nowhere in the assessment of Castells's recent work. It is only through careful reading that we will be able to decipher its main lessons and underpinnings. As was already hinted in the above discussion, the central theoretical tension in Castells's perspective is the desire to avoid both an overtly technological view of the society and an economically reductionist perspective. He aims to operate in a kind of liminal space where the explanatory power of the old is declared to be obsolete, but the new one is still somewhat uncharted. How credible are the results that come out of this ambition? I think that it would be an error not to raise serious questions concerning Castells's emphases, even if many passages in *The Information Age* have

been carefully crafted to give the impression that he has managed to steer clear of dilemmas of determinism that haunt social and cultural sciences.

Three intertwined questions are pertinent for this evaluation. They refer directly to Castells's main interest areas mentioned above. The first one concerns the question of social change: does the model on the basis of which Castells operates overemphasize the novelty of recent technological developments (so that he commits the error of being myopic in a historical sense)? Second, can his work be criticized as an instance of technological determinism (with all the negative attributes that such a view holds)? The third question that I will take on board relates to power: how should we evaluate Castells's view of technology and domination in relation to the media and communications? Is it uncritical in the sense that he ignores or downplays forms and expressions of social power that do not fit into his overall network society framework? All of these questions have a global dimension and it is also within these three main areas that the problems of Castells's analyses lie.

In order to counter criticism of his work, Castells has repeatedly expressed his exasperation concerning each of these questions in the context of his work. Nonetheless, I do not think that we can dispense with these critical issues. They are necessarily of interest for my own discussion, which targets Castells's view of media and communications. They relate to fundamental commitments in social theory (and media theory), ultimately to the question of what kind of models we use in "making sense of our world" (Castells 2000b, 366) and with what analytic and political outcomes.

### Selective Media Histories and the Digital Sublime

To start with the issue of social change and the "newness" of new media, Castells proposes the following perspective:

"Frankly, the question of newness, which I am asked again and again, is a boring one, and I would say not very productive. I think it is obvious that global electronic communication from many to many, in real time or in chosen time, is a new technology, and a new organizational form – indeed a new medium of communication. But ultimately, I do not care if it is new. It is our essential medium of communication, around which most dominant activities, and a growing share of our personal communication, are being structured." (Castells and Ince 2003, 23)

In the third part of the trilogy (Castells 2000b, 367), the author presses the point home thus:

"My main statement is that it does not really matter if you believe that this world, or any of its features, is new or not. My analysis stands by itself. This is our world, the world of the Information Age. And this is my analysis of this world, which must be understood, used, judged, by itself, by its capacity,

or incapacity, to identify and explain the phenomena that we observe and experience, regardless of its newness.”

These statements, even though forcefully presented, are odd in light of the general tendency of Castells’s work. It is true that Castells does not claim that everything has changed in the information age – he refers to patterns of stability in the realms of social power relations, for instance – but he is clearly more interested in what is new. He notes that to think that society is somehow “fundamentally unchanged” is plainly wrong, an “easy way out” (Castells and Ince 2003, 24). Instead, Castells (200b, 367) underscores that “after all, if nothing new is under the sun, why bother to try to investigate, think, write, and read about it?”

Why indeed? To study change seems to be a matter of common sense, requiring no further elaboration. That nothing ever really stays the same was noticed already by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus some 2500 years ago (“Everything flows, nothing stands still”). Even ancient civilizations went through significant changes in their social organization, but it is generally agreed that especially the study of modern societies is founded on the dimension of change. In his study of social theory and historical processes, Anthony Smith (1976, 4–5) writes that “many would regard the study of social life and that of social change as coextensive. Sociology, in particular, is seen as nothing more or less than the study of social change in all its forms. And the study of social persistence must, in that case, become merely a special case of the study of social change, namely arrested change”. More to the point, sociology, both in its classical and postmodern versions, is more often than not based on the assumption that we are witnessing changes that are leading to a wholly new sociality. Hence it is “the eternal condition of sociology” to foster a sense of “inadequacy in the face of apparently colossal, indeed millennial social change” (Golding 2000, 165).

Castells’s explorations carry on this long tradition. He makes a number of sweeping arguments concerning the novelty of the information age. In the conclusion of the first part of the trilogy Castells (2000a, 508) writes, for example, that “in a broad historical perspective, the network society represents a qualitative change in the human experience”. Furthermore, he claims that “we are just entering a new stage”, characterized by “a purely cultural pattern of social interaction and social organization”, where “flows of messages and images between networks constitute the basic thread of our social structure”. This “is the beginning of a new existence, and indeed the beginning of a new age, the Information Age, marked by the autonomy of culture vis-à-vis the material bases of our existence” (ibid.).

In this, as everywhere in his work, Castells places mediated phenomena (flows of messages, images and information) and communication technologies firmly in the core of social, cultural, economic and political change. They constitute the new virtual structures of the “network society” and they are the central building blocks of his spatio-temporal social theory that examines a global transformation in the making. The fact of the matter, then, is that Castells does “care” about the newness of the so-called new media; indeed, very much so. The question of whether “this world, or any of its features, is new or not” is of utmost importance to him, even though he misleadingly claims



otherwise. It is not so that his “analysis stands by itself”, or that he aims to understand “our world [...] regardless of its newness” (see citations above). Castells’s analysis stands precisely on the idea that media- and communication-technological changes are so sweeping that one must speak of a fundamentally new society or global order.

There are, however, reasons why such an assumption is doubtful. For one thing, against Castells’s belief that social change and novelties are necessarily more important than persistent social and cultural structures and forms (“if nothing new is under the sun, why bother to try to investigate, think, write, and read about it?”), it can be argued that nothing requires us to place change, logically speaking, above stability (see Smith 1976, 6–7). There are plenty of examples of relatively durable patterns of social organization and social communication in the network society that make it hard “to judge the priority of either persistence or change in social affairs” (ibid., 6). This holds true in the contemporary context as well. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot speak of a myriad of changes in recent decades in economic activities around the world (e.g., the financialization of the economy) or in family life (the increase of new kinds of family types besides the traditional heteronormative form), or in media and communications (the internet), for that matter. However, the fact that social life is based on ceaseless activity, movement and the emergence of new features does not mean necessarily that these constitute truly significant changes or wholly new type of activities. There is always the possibility that the phenomena that are claimed to be of new quality are merely continuations of long since established dynamics.

Here we encounter, of course, matters of judgement, perspective and decision regarding the question of what counts as “significant” social change and what is merely a shift inside some durable constellation. Hence we need to ask why something is proclaimed to be a sign of a new social form, on what theoretical basis these claims are made and what evidence is offered to back up these claims.

It is, as has been noted previously, in the realm of time and space that Castells finds the most pressing qualitative changes, the emergence of “timeless time” and “spaces of flows”. As will be recalled, the concept of “spaces of flows” refers to the idea that while earlier societies consisted of specific places (nation states, locales) that were separated from each other by distinctive geographic, cultural, political and legal boundaries, the informational society is organised around flows and networks whose “structural logic” is placeless, even though physical places still continue to exist. These flows are “processes *dominating* our economic, political, and symbolic life”, and they are “made possible by information technology devices” (Castells 2000a, 442).

Such ideas “give the appearance of being quite radical departures from familiar modalities” (McLennan 2003, 561). But are they? Castells (2000a, 15) agrees that networks are “very old forms of social organization”, but claims that “they have taken on a new life in the Information Age by becoming information networks, powered by new information technologies”. However, here one needs to remember that electronic information and communications networks have a long history that reaches well beyond Castells’s information age. The rise of worldwide network of electronic communication can be traced back to the period roughly between 1860 and 1930 (Winseck and Pike 2007; McMahon 2002). By the end of the nineteenth century, the telegraph had

connected all continents and its impact was felt throughout the social structure and its dominant functions. In the field of politics, it altered the nature of diplomatic relations by removing dependence on human carriers of information (Nickles 1999); in the economy, cable communications lay the foundation for effectively transnational finance systems and fast exchange of business information between distant places which “forced speculators to find new ways of intervening in markets” (Mattelart 2000, 8).

Whatever one may think of the difference regarding the intensity and extensiveness of the mentioned technological processes between the late nineteenth century and more recent times, the fact remains that a similar “structural logic” of flows to which Castells refers – the absorption of distinct locales into networks that link them together and the extension of communication beyond nation state borders – was well established already in the earlier period. In this context, one learns much from Winseck’s and Pike’s (2007) history of the globalization of media (telegraph, news agencies) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Criticizing earlier accounts which claim a close fit between national interests, inter-imperial rivalry and the development of media-technological networks, they argue that rather than being tied to territorial dominance (although that was also a factor), the early forms of media globalization resulted from the actions of liberal globalizers from many countries who wanted to make the world open to investment and capitalist property relations, often in the guise of discourses of “modernization”. Those interests were realized to a considerable extent, and as a result “globalization during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth was not just shallow and fleeting, but deep and durable”, built around networks and hubs that “supported huge flows of capital, technology, people, news, and ideas which, in turn, led to a high degree of convergence among markets, merchants, and bankers” (ibid., 1–2). This form of global interdependence was pushed back with rising nationalism in the 1930s, but it was strong enough to put into proportion Castells’ heavy theoretical investment into spatio-temporal changes (propelled by post-1945 information and communication technologies) as the locus of a new modernity, forcing us to regard them as processes of intensification – however impressive they are – rather than as qualitative novelties.

The problem in terms of the construction of an argument lies in the fact that Castells does not present a historical analysis, akin to Winsecks’ and Pike’s version, of the development of electronic communication technologies from the point of view of their assumed revolutionary character (apart from one skeletal footnote in volume one of the trilogy, see Castells 2000a, 30). Because of this, he is blind to an important distinction made by Golding (2000) between “Technology One”, which “allows existing social action and process to occur more speedily, more efficiently, or conveniently”, and “Technology Two”, which “enables wholly new forms of activity previously impracticable or even inconceivable”. New information technologies are examples of the former category, since “the profound social impact of telegraphy vastly exceeded, at least so far, that of more recent ICTs” (ibid., 171; see also Standage 1998, 199–200).

Besides these historical and empirical counterarguments, Castells’s analyses of communication technology have also a cultural-philosophical edge that warrants critical evaluation. In the conclusion of his trilogy, Castells adds one final dimension to his

consideration of the novelty of “spaces of flows”: the often-used trope of “annihilation of space and time by electronic means”, or “the superseding of places” (Castells 2000b, 374, 381). In the modern Western imagination, *Zeitgeist* is very typically associated with communication technologies and their capacity to put an end to geography. Such thinking gained momentum especially with the diffusion of the telegraph in the late nineteenth century. The years between 1880 and 1918 were a veritable “culture of time and space” (Kern 1983) in North America, a period characterized by all kinds of awestruck social commentaries that proclaimed the overcoming of time and space with the help of new communications and transportation technology. The “death of distance”, “the annihilation of time and space” and “the end of geography” are interchangeable titles to one of the most often told stories of the history of communication. It has been repeated with regard to the telegraph, the telephone, radio, television and the internet. For Mosco (2004), it is a recurring myth of truly farcical proportions. Its very recurrence suggests that “rather than ending time, space, and social relations as we have known them, the rise of cyberspace amounts to just another in a series of interesting, but ultimately banal exercises in the extension of human tools. They are potentially very profound extensions, but not enough to warrant claims about the end of anything, other than the end of a chapter in a seemingly never ending story” (Ibid., 119).

Naturally, the same story can be told in various ways, and there is no point in trying to argue that Castells has put forward a particularly simple-minded version of it. The *Zeitgeist* philosopher *par excellence* Oswald Spengler romanticized in the early 1920s that the “intoxicated soul” of Western civilization was about to “fly above space and Time”, noting that aeroplanes and radio – “Faustian technics” that made it possible for “Man [...] [to] leave the bonds of the body” – were weaving “the earth over with an infinite web of subtle forces, currents and tensions” (Spengler 1928 [1922], 503–504). Castells is more cautious in his conclusions, but his thinking belongs to a continuum. In the introduction to his *Understanding Media*, McLuhan (1964, 19) explained what he meant with what would become his most often cited slogan (“global village”): “After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding [...] Today, after more than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned”. “As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village” (ibid., 20). Castells is not initiated into the kind of rapturous media-communal tribalism that McLuhan advocated. However, this qualification merely hides the basic similarity of their media analysis and its core theme: spatio-temporal compression and its broad cultural effects. Due to the recurrence of this theme in media research and social commentary of media in the past 100–150 years, it is a poor indicator of what is now “historically new” (Castells 2000b, 367).<sup>9</sup>

9 As was noted before, the telegraph suited this role better at the time of its introduction; the electronic communication technologies that have come after it have been less innovative in comparison. The myths around the novelty of the internet diminish in strength when one realizes that the rhetoric that has been used in connection to it is similar to that which was deployed following the invention of the telegraph, “which attracted the same form of almost spiritual accreditation as Castells accords new ICTs” (Golding 2000, 172). For late nineteenth century social commentary on the telegraph, see e.g. Marvin 1988; Standage 1998; Briggs and Burke 2002, 133ff.

It should be noted that I am not arguing against the relevance of time-space compression for sociology and media analysis as such. What I find questionable is the way in which Castells and many other academic globalization theorists (e.g. Beck 2000, 20–21) showcase it in the present context. A look into social history reveals that there is a tendency in modern societies towards seeing the current epoch always as exceptional; this tendency has related especially to developments of media (Burke 1992, 137). The idea that time and space have now been overcome, once and for all, seems to accompany each media and communication technological invention, offering satisfaction for generational narcissism. In Western epochal analyses of the past 150 years, distance appears as a living corpse, having been declared dead thousands of times.

However, there is more to the issue than simple historic myopia. Beyond the fact that similar thoughts of time and space have been presented before, they reflect certain mythical and ideological features. The attitude that yearns for novelty is fuelled by the mythical belief in technological progress. This theme has been discussed by Nye (1994) as the “technological sublime”. Whereas in traditional society the sublime was associated with the wonders of nature, in the modern period it has been projected onto human-built monuments of industry, bureaucracy and science: the railroad, huge bridges, skyscrapers, airplanes, arms, nuclear power, and, especially since the telegraph, onto communications technology. Through these technological achievements, human society in essence worships itself. The latest form of this cultural trait is “the digital sublime” (Mosco 2004), aroused by the internet and the cyberspace, which has survived, despite dot.com crashes and other instances of unfulfilled millennial fantasies. The technological sublime reaches beyond the current moment, offering visionary promises of a more prosperous and glorious future and transcendence from the anxieties and banalities of everyday life (ibid., 117–118).

The technological sublime is akin to a myth: it motivates and drives people into action by creating a powerful visionary realm. According to Jacques Ellul (1965), myths are resilient features of human culture – providing “man [sic] with a fundamental image of his condition and the world at large” (ibid., 116). They offer a religious (or quasi-religious) sense of something that is bigger than the individual – a sense of collective destiny, spiritual progress and forward movement. Updating Ellul’s work in the present moment, Karim (2003, 73) notes that in the modern secular world, technology embodies “the sense of mystery that was once the province of religion”. This is now manifested “in the mass amazement expressed towards the capabilities of the internet; it seems magical, even miraculous, in enabling activities that were supposedly impossible”, such as the overcoming of time and space and a new, more democratic political culture.

Discourses of technological progress are connected to domination. There are two main ways to look at this relationship, which can be called the mythic and the ideological. From a cultural pessimistic viewpoint, as expressed by Ellul, technological imaginaries enchant human consciousness by creating and amplifying feelings of omnipotence that have an irrational streak. For Ellul (1964), the modern technological society demands unquestioning devotion and conformity towards its achievements, making humans ultimately slaves rather than agents of their own destiny. This is roughly the same narrative that one encounters in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1947]), or (in a milder version) in Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* (1934). In these works, the major theme is human self-domination. According to this narrative, people have, since the dawn of civilization, attempted to master nature by technology. But this effort has gone seriously awry. It has not resulted in continuous moral and ethical progress but instead in the building of massive technosystems and the subjection of all to these objective forces that seem to stand beyond human agency. In the language of critical theory, liberation from the mythic fear caused by nature is thwarted by the descent into a new kind of barbarism in which humanity is fettered by the total domination of instrumental rationality.

The bad consequences of this pessimistic theory of history and civilization are well known. One of its main weaknesses is the opaqueness of the concept of domination and its association with the mastery over nature (see e.g. Jarvis 1998, 33–37; Callinicos 1999, 254). From a more properly sociologically informed perspective, technological development must be analyzed and criticized as an issue that is bound up with class power, rather than from a viewpoint in which humanity and nature are pitted against each other. The technological sublime must not be interpreted as a modern myth that has captivated humanity as a whole but, more properly, as an ideology that serves social hierarchies. From this angle, the myths surrounding “the annihilation of time and space” and other elevated promises of the current “information technology revolution” foster belief in the dynamism of the existing social order and the political and economic elite groups who dominate the development of technological infrastructures.

Optimistic scenarios of how some new technology changes society for good obscure the fact that power over how technologies are introduced is not evenly distributed (Winner 2004, 48). Furthermore, technological development is connected to broad societal planning. In modern capitalism, decisions concerning what kind of technologies are developed and what are not, are made by political elites and leaders in the corporate sector who have more resources than others “to mold society to match the needs of emerging technological systems and organizational plans” (ibid.). In addition, new technologies must fit in with a society and culture where consumption and the possession of industrially produced commodities is the primary goal of life or is at least offered as such by constant public propagation. What accompanies this is also a paternal attitude towards the citizens: their role is to adapt to a technological future that is presented as something that is non-negotiable (but equally wondrous) (see ibid., 49–51).

What does all of this have to do with Castells? The concept of the technological sublime and the two above-discussed versions of how technology and domination have been interlaced in the history of Western thought help to clarify his theoretical position and lay a foundation for critique. At first glance, it would seem that Castells is careful enough to steer clear of overtly optimistic accounts of new information and communication technologies. For instance, in his account of how new media affects politics, Castells notes that they can be both instruments of domination and resistance. But there is more to the issue than this. I have already pointed out that Castells's fascination with the theme of overcoming the constraints of time and space flirts with the sublime aspect of new technology, which is problematic from a historical

perspective. Moreover, while his analysis of the media and communications is obviously less pessimistic than the version given by the early Frankfurt school, it includes an understanding of the history of technology and social communication that may not be that dissimilar to critical theory in certain respects. Nonetheless, the conclusions that he draws from that history are different, in ways that raise some critical questions.

In order to discuss this, we must remember a key motive in Castells's media analysis: a stage theory of cultural history that is deeply medium-theoretical in its orientation. In a broadly similar way to McLuhan, Castells (2000a, 355–356) looks at the history of human social communication as a process with three stages. The first one is the era of oral tradition, face-to-face communication and close-knit communities. The second stage starts with the invention of the phonetic alphabet, reaching full maturity with the diffusion of the printing press, books and newspapers. This “alphabetic order” is closely connected to the development of Western philosophy, cumulative science, rationality and hierarchical rule. After the era of literacy a third stage emerges, and this is the most important one for both McLuhan and Castells, especially as it contrasts sharply with the previous era. As was noted in Chapter 3, McLuhan thinks that a major historic turning point was reached with the coming of electronic communication and television in particular; these gave rise to a more communal and sensuous culture – a return to the first stage of orality in a new globalized form. For McLuhan, the shift was positive: the post-Gutenbergian media culture is more interactive, inclusive and generally more sensually “wholesome” than the overtly rationalized and specialized culture of print.

In general, Castells too thinks that the electronic media sphere is empowering. However, he writes in the late 1990s and about the internet, whereas McLuhan wrote in the 1960s when the cultural impact of television was peaking. Castells refers to the concept of “technologies of freedom” – coined in the early 1980s by a staunch cold war warrior, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983) – as he writes of the development of the internet. The internet is of interest to him in several respects, especially because of its cultural centrality, its relation to community-formation and because of its empowering features. Castells (2000a, 384) claims that the internet “will remain, technologically open, enabling widespread public access and seriously limiting governmental and commercial restrictions to such access, although social inequality will powerfully manifest itself in the electronic domain”. They are pervasive, decentralized and flexible; “unlike the mass media [...] they have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualization” (*ibid.*, 385).

Interestingly then, “the McLuhan Galaxy” of television and other electronic mass media are for Castells similar in their features to the “Gutenberg Galaxy” discussed by McLuhan. This is to say that they are depicted by the authors as standardized, over-rationalized cultures of domination. The main difference between the authors lies in their historical assessment of media-technological change relative to domination: McLuhan placed his hopes in television, which he saw as affording channels for interaction and participation; Castells now places it in the internet for the same reasons.

Castells sees two important processes that have led to a more communicative and transparent media sphere in the information age. The first refers to a change within the mass media proper: for Castells, the McLuhan Galaxy was homogenous and

unidirectional, whereas contemporary television culture is decentralized, diversified and de-massified. What is crucial for Castells (2000a, 370) is “a fundamental difference” between the new mass media and “the old system of standardized mass media”: namely, the claim that now “the audience [can] create its own visual mosaics” because of the abundance of choice. This is already liberating, but there is still something amiss with the traditional media complex clustered around television: it is not truly on the same evolutionary level with the rest of the society. It is still a “world of one-way communication, not of interaction” (ibid.). The negative effects of television are visible in the mediatization of politics – it is essentially “scandal politics” for Castells (2007) – which he associates strongly with social alienation and the loss of trust of citizens towards national governments and politics in general.

Luckily, according to Castells, there is a second major process whose impact is now felt across the board. A new kind of media sphere, where the internet takes the center stage, offers true interactionality for the first time in history. Here, Castells (2000a, 371) sees a technological teleology that has led to audience empowerment:

“Television needed the computer to be free from the screen. But their coupling, with major potential consequences for the society at large, came after a long detour taken by computers in order to be able to talk to television only after learning to talk to each other. Only then could the audience speak up.”

More recently, Castells has continued his analysis of the new media sphere and its capacity to beat the legitimacy crisis that threatens the society. The basic constituents of his account have remained the same, but there is more meat around the bones. He now writes that “the communication foundation of the network society is the global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many” (Castells 2007, 246). With this a new kind of social communication emerges, “mass self-communication”, the most potent example of which is the multiplication of blogs. According to Castells, these provide an effective remedy to the problems of political legitimacy created by the mass media system of earlier times. This is because “horizontal communication networks” such as blogs are based on flows of autonomous, self-generated content, “reconstruct[ing] every second the global and local production of meaning in the public mind” (ibid., 248). Thus, the nature of political communication goes through a sea change. It is no longer determined by the twin influence of political elites and professional journalists who make up the agenda, with the audience standing in the margins as spectators and not as participants. This exclusive dyad is bypassed by active bloggers who are free to take over the publicity of the network society with their own counter-messages.

Before evaluating this standpoint, it should be noted that Castells’s historical analysis of media and power is based on a theory of modernity that sees it as a period of gradually increasing standardization, alienation and stagnation. In this, it is similar to the account of modernity outlined by the first generation of the Frankfurt School. For Adorno, alienation and reification in modern society was caused partly by the



commercial logic of the media (the culture industry), which absorbed the subject into empty sociality. For Castells, the impact of modern mass media has also been damaging in terms of social empowerment, but now he sees light at the end of the tunnel. The network society is a different kind of modernity, characterized by democratization and emancipation. These features are enabled above all by the new “horizontal” media and communications technology.

What I am arguing is that Castells can reach such an optimistic conclusion only through selective weighting of history, social dynamics and technological developments – or, in fact, through collapsing them onto each other. The method for this selection follows a medium-theoretical understanding of how media and power are related. As the argument goes, the properties of media and communications technology allow different things in different stages of history; we can analyze their societal and cultural effects primarily by looking at these properties. For instance, Castells celebrates the collapse of “statism” in the East as an instance of how a totalizing social order fell apart due to “the principles of informationalism embodied in new information technologies” (Castells 2000a, 13). However, another power structure is still in place, more firmly than ever: the global capitalist system of market and social relations. But whatever negative implications this system has for, say, individual autonomy, social equality, human security or political accountability, they are undermined by the same principles, according to Castells. It is not, then, that Castells would leave enduring social and economic dynamics out of his analysis (he does not, generally speaking), but that the force and logic of technological innovation is ultimately decisive for him.

#### Technology: Determinant in the Last Instance

It is possible to counter this claim by referring to passages in Castells’s trilogy that show keen awareness of rooted properties of modernity. However, I think that it holds as a generalization that helps us to understand a number of peculiarities of Castells’s work and some by now recurrent criticisms made against it. A key one is the charge that his work is technologically deterministic (which is, of course, raised against information society thinking in general). This theme needs some commentary here.

Technologically determinist thinking is deemed to be bad sociology because it claims that technological innovations and diffusion follow their own dynamics, which is disconnected from the rest of the society: “New technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress” (Williams 1974, 13). In other words, technology drives history forward. This view is often linked to an ideological imperative, suggesting that societies have to adapt to technological changes that are inevitable and necessary (an argument that the commercial sector can use to market its products and in order to push for deregulation and other favourable policies). Against this view, Williams (1974; 1985) argued that the impact of technologies is heavily mediated by social forces, especially political and economic considerations, that are decisive for the ultimate outcome of technological development (see also Winston 1998). This is a constant that is at play



also in the field of communications technology and, indeed, Williams directed his criticism towards McLuhan in particular. The point is that the development of radio and television, for example, did not follow a predetermined path marked by the mechanical properties of these technologies. It was the outcome of social and institutional battles which resulted in historically particular forms of broadcasting in different countries (commercial, public or authoritarian), all of which reflected and continue to reflect the interests of state or corporate power which limit the democratic potential of media and communications technology. What a new communication technology “affords” is in practice very far from what it actually delivers.

According to Williams’s (1977, 87) theory of determination, it means both “the setting of limits” and “the exertion of pressures”. In terms of how technologies are developed, this means that due to the current distribution of social and economic power, the best resourced groups have more influence on technological development and its likely consequences. Therefore, technology is socially determined, rather than vice versa; it reflects the original intentions of those who administer its planning, development and diffusion. However, Williams allows a dialectic within these limits, pointing out that nobody can wholly control the social consequences of new technologies; there are “unforeseen effects” or alternative uses of technology which qualify the intentions of those who develop it (Williams 1974, 129; Freedman 2003, 181). Thus, the final outcome of how a given technology takes its place in the social field results from human social action and struggle, although the ratio of power between state and corporate actors on one side and civil society on the other is far from being equal.

Does the development of media and communications technology in the network society depart from this outline in significant ways? Castells seems to think so, although the view that he offers is not totally at odds with Williams’s perspective. Castells wants to eradicate any hint that he is technologically determinist and offers his own version of society-technology dialectic: “Technology does not determine society; it embodies it. But nor does society determine technological innovation: it uses it”. In fact, Castells argues that the whole issue of technological determinism is “probably a false problem”, not worth the struggles that it has prompted in sociological debates, on purely logical grounds: “technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools” (Castells 2000a, 5). These are, however, merely formal assertions, and as such they do not say much. At the most, they express the fact that Castells is no naïve technological determinist.<sup>10</sup> Only after we add the issue of media

10 There are different degrees of technological determinism. Leo Marx and Merrit Roe Smith (1994, xii-xiii) distinguish between “hard” and “soft” versions of it: in the former version, “for better and for worse, our technologies permit few alternatives to their inherent dictates”, whereas in the latter, technology has no historical agency as such, as its development is located in “a far more various and complex social, economic, political, and cultural matrix”. (In fact, one may question whether the “soft” version is technologically determinist at all.) More analytically, Bimber (1994) argues that there is only one type of thinking that is actually technologically determinist; it is “nomological technological determinism”, according to which technological developments follow a “naturally given logic, which is not culturally or socially determined, and that these developments force social adaptation and changes [...] the technology-driven society emerges regardless of human desires and values” (ibid., 84). For Bimber (ibid., 90-100), Karl Marx was not representative of such thinking, as for him technology was just one factor in historical change. It is clear that Castells is not a “hard” or “nomological” determinist. Yet, as I argue in this Chapter, he has formulations in his work which suggest that he accords technology much more causal power than Marx, sometimes arousing suspicion that he has succumbed to

and communications technology and its relation to domination to the picture can we evaluate Castells's views more conclusively.

In his more recent analysis of the rise of "mass self communication", Castells (2007, 259) notes that "power holders have understood the need to enter the battle in the horizontal communication networks", exemplified by strategies of big corporations who aim to commercialize the internet and use it as a site for advertising. However, the issue that most concerns Castells here is concomitant with his "overarching conclusion" (mentioned above) according to which "the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power". While political elites and the corporate actors try to gain a foothold in the new media space by making it subservient to their own goals, Castells insists that in the end, the logic of technological development prevails and the internet is associated more with empowerment than with domination. A major reason for this is "the liberating spirit" and "the culture of freedom, individual innovation, and entrepreneurialism that grew from the 1960s culture of American campuses", leaving its mark on the inherently "open" structure of the internet (Castells 2000a, 5). In this sense, the internet is a "technology of freedom" in ways in which the old broadcast media was not. Thus, there is a decisively technological determinist logic in Castells's thinking concerning media and communications, their relation to social domination and their historical trajectory. He expresses this, for example, by writing that "it is plausible to think that the capacity of social actors to set up autonomously their political agenda is greater in the networks of mass self-communication than in the corporate world of the mass media" (Castells 2007, 257).<sup>11</sup>

I am not claiming that technological determinism characterizes Castells's work entirely. As will be recalled, he explains the rise of the network society also on the basis of capitalist restructuration. However, even if he does support the inclusion of political economy as a analytic tool in the evaluation of the Information Age, it is curiously absent in his account of media and communications. His qualifying remark (Castells 2007, 259) that "the emerging public space, rooted in communication, is not predetermined in its form by any kind of historical fate or technological necessity" is an afterthought. Castells's medium-theoretical understanding of the history of media and communications leads him to support a view according to which the development of the public sphere is predetermined sufficiently enough so that determination by social forces is overridden by technological ones: "in spite of all efforts to regulate, privatize, and commercialize the Internet and its tributary systems, CMC networks, inside and

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technological determinism, and that his analysis of the dynamics and history of changes in media technology, in particular, is infected with the dilemma in question.

11 In a sense, this is of course true: it is hard for many actors of civil society to have their voice heard in the "corporate media". They are faced with all sorts of journalistic measures by which their messages can be undermined. For instance, it is a common practice that in their reports of even major demonstrations, professional journalists of the mainstream media only cover the disturbances on order caused by the demonstrators and trivialize the motives of those who organize demonstrations, or even mock them (e.g. Gitlin 2003). In other words, critical social movements do not fit the "frames" of traditional news media. Through creating publicity in the internet, such practices and frames can be bypassed. However, it is another question to evaluate how deeply online publics challenge established political orders. Furthermore, "greater participation in political discussion is not the sole determinant of democracy" (Papacharissi 2004, 386), i.e., there are other matters besides media technology that affect the setting of the political agenda and its social impact.

outside the Internet, are characterized by their pervasiveness, their multi-faceted de-centralization, and their flexibility. They sprawl as colonies of micro-organisms” (Castells 2000a, 385). To sum up, such language, fashionably borrowing metaphors from natural processes to describe social ones, together with Castells’s general analysis of media and communications, suggest strongly that, for him, technology does not indeed determine everything but is still determinant in the last instance.

#### Social Power and “the Lack of Political Economic Determination”

From another perspective, Castells’s tilting towards technological explanations is also visible in that which he leaves out of his analysis. An important aspect in this sense, mentioned briefly above, is what Castells himself has mentioned as a potential criticism of his analysis of media and communication: “the lack of political economic determination” (Castells 1998, 480). This lack has two forms: critical political economic explanations are either absolutely neglected in his account of the development of the media, or their analytic value is played down by Castells. The first occurs, for example, in the way in which he considers the rise of television in the United States and elsewhere (Castells 2000a, 358–359). In this narration, the restructuration of capitalism after the Second World War – the need to set private consumption in motion, especially with the help of television, after a period of a very different kind of mass mobilization – vanishes from sight. The emergence of television is explained by its congruence, itself technologically based, with “the basic instinct of a lazy audience” (*ibid.*, 358), the members of which demand easy-to-get amusement. Serious studies on the historical rise of mass culture and its underlying social and economic dynamics (e.g. Ohmann 1996) expose the weaknesses of such an unhistorical and surprisingly lax analysis.

A second omission is more eye-catching: Castells has a very thin conception of media systems as a whole and does not analyze them from a structural-historical perspective. One result of this is that Castells does not discuss the development of public service media and related trends in broadcasting policy in his work at all, especially in terms of how these reflect the general neoliberalization of Western media (see e.g. Chakravartty and Sarikakis 2006, 85ff). In all probability, this is caused by Castells’s preoccupation with the internet and other types of computer-mediated-communication as a contemporary evolutionary standard, against which public service broadcasting appears as an anachronism (it belongs to “the McLuhan Galaxy” of traditional mass media, made obsolete by the rise of “mass self communication”, globalization and the consequent demise of the nation state to which public service broadcasting is historically tied). Whatever the reason for this neglect, I think it is premature, since public service media are still central to cultural life in many countries and since it is possible to envision ways to reinvent public service media so that it meets the requirements set by the age of the internet and globalization, granted that this is not an easy task (see Murdock 2005; Raboy and Taras 2005). Castells’s avoidance of this issue is questionable in terms of a critical theory of media and society, as it forgets the “core rationale for public service broadcasting”, i.e., its “commitment to providing the cultural resources required for full

citizenship” (Murdock 2005, 214). The normative basis for defending the public service model lies in that it stands against the commercial enclosure of the public sphere and public goods that proceeds apace globally. Against this development, Murdock (ibid., 227) writes of “digital commons”, a network of public and civil institutions linked together by public broadcasting as its “central node”, and whose operation is based on “free and universal access, reciprocity, and collaborative activity”.

Castells has also written enthusiastically about internet-based collaborative activities and exchanges that resist the logic of capital (see e.g. Castells 2000a, 384) but in contrast to Murdock, he does not include the principle of public service in them in any way. He sees an irreversible shift from the former institutionalized public sphere to a new communications space. Therefore, in the global network society, the interests of civil society are represented by “social movements, individual autonomy projects, and insurgent politics that find a more favorable terrain in the emerging realm of mass self-communication” (Castells 2007, 258–259). While I do not want to diminish the role of the internet for progressive political mobilization and public discourse unreasonably, this argument is too optimistic on at least two levels. First, it offers no resolution to the fragmentary nature of “mass self-communication”, which diminishes its political impact. For instance, in the United States, the so-called political blogosphere offers an ocean of sites for the like-minded to meet each other and ignore challenges to their opinion. This represents a “hollowing of collective space”, which is problematic in the contemporary context “where world views are increasingly polarised and talking across differences on a basis of knowledge and respect is more vital than ever to a working deliberative system” (Murdock 2005, 223). The second problem has to do with information resources. Even though the blogosphere represents a hopeful new vehicle for the formation of opinion and dissemination of alternative information, it is far from being free from the problems that Castells associates with traditional institutional media. According to a survey made in the United States (Wall 2005, 164), only five per cent of the links made by news-oriented bloggers during the US war with Iraq in 2003 were directed to “alternative media”, e.g., sites maintained by citizen activists; the overwhelming majority of material circulated in these blogs comes from the familiar mainstream media (in this case, *The New York Times*, CNN, etc.). The erosion of public service broadcasting is of concern also in this sense, as this institution is more resourced than any individual blogger to offer a steady stream of new information whose production is relatively independent of commercial demands and government (with qualifications of course), thus assisting in the viability of civil society.

What I have brought out here refers to structural factors that have been analyzed especially by critical political economists of the media. These factors do not show up in Castells’s work (see, however, page 293). The major conclusions that Castells draws from media and its globalization always come back to the inherent properties of media technology, especially the “open” character of “new media”. Thus, he makes the dubious assumption that “the power of flows” has taken over “flows of power” in ways which are broadly emancipatory. Against this view, I argue that it is false to assume that the new media and communications technologies are by their nature more emancipatory than the “old” broadcasting media. Together with Castells, we can find and celebrate

numerous examples of, say, grass-roots activism supported by the internet. But the question of how these activities relate to the totality of uses across different media is not addressed by Castells.

As noted, Castells claims that the internet, by its design, “seriously limits” commercial and state restrictions to access. Nonetheless, the architecture of the internet is structured so that while it is in principle fully amorphous and offers nothing but choices, in practice a relatively small number of commercial portal sites accounts for most of the traffic (and sell audiences to advertisers in the process, as would any other commercially functioning media) (see e.g. Freedman 2003, 186). Similarly, it is not at all clear whether the power of the state is undermined by the internet and other applications of new information technology in ways which are more effective compared to earlier media. From a historic perspective, “clandestine communication” against state censorship and other forms of mediated counter-power has existed throughout the social history of modern media (see Briggs and Burke 2002). Even television (as a technological medium) has been used to enhance civic participation (see e.g. Williams 1974, 133). Conversely, today new means of communication are being used by the state and also by corporations to conduct surveillance on citizens and consumers “at unprecedented intensive and extensive levels while it is vastly more organized and technology-based than hitherto” (Ball and Webster 2003, 1). Castells has relatively little to say about this, since it goes against the grain of his own narrative: the intensification of surveillance is an example of how “the power of flows” are used and monitored in ways which support one way “flows of power”. In brief, these two poles (political and economic power versus the assumed “agentless” power of networks) are separated too deeply by Castells.

It is notable that when Castells discusses economic power and the media, he does this mainly so as to notice how insignificant it is as a feature of social and political domination. For example, he (1998, 476) writes of the formation of global media corporations and the effects of this for domination: “Yes, Murdoch and all media tycoons are more powerful than most political leaders; but only as long as their media are credible and only as long as political forces, all interest groups in society in fact, acknowledge this dominance”. On this basis, Castells proceeds to make the claim that whatever methods corporations and their top executives use in order to influence public opinion is negated by the new technological logic: “Information networks, in the age of Internet, are truly out of control [...] power dissolves [...] while information flows never stop flowing” (ibid.).

I think it is rather bold to state that information networks are “truly out of control”, given that corporations and states still have enormous resources in their hands to influence public perspectives on important social issues through different types of public relations activities (such as video news releases), which always contain a degree of secrecy, or by starting up their own media businesses. To use the same example that Castells does, Rupert Murdoch launched Fox News channel in 1996. It now dominates the American cable news market by offering journalism which complies with his anti-liberal worldview and that of many of its millions of regular viewers (and nearly 100 million subscribers; see Carter 2008). Such numbers are not easily reached by even the

most popular political blogs that aim to offer a serious alternative to mainstream media outlets, even though some of them boast of impressive number of daily visits. It is much easier for a so-called media tycoon to do this, with the help of marketing departments and professionally run news rooms that provide original content (whatever the quality), all of which requires vast assets.

Castells is nevertheless certainly right to argue that we should not make too much out of the power of individual power holders over the public sphere. This theme, however, should not end the discussion of how economic power and domination are related in the media sphere. Hesmondhalgh (2007, 204) notes, rightly, that “focusing to an excessive degree on media moguls can distract attention from systemic features of the cultural industries”. By these systemic features he means the whole economic logic of how the media operates under the conditions set by the market and how this affects its production and consumption (see section 3.3). For Castells, such issues are not of much concern and he rejects their importance. While Castells notes the concentration of media industries into oligopolies at the global level and the resulting commercialization of television (Castells 2000a, 369), these remarks are mainly vehicles for arguments that chart the transforming power of the informational mode of development. He writes characteristically that, “while there is oligopolistic concentration of multimedia groups, there is, at the same time, market segmentation, and the rise of interactive audience, superseding the uniformity of mass audience” (Castells 2000c, 12).

Here Castells arranges against each other issues that are not incongruous at all, which he does once again as he writes of late-capitalist media economy. The meaning of his sentence is dictated by his main idea according to which hierarchical structures are replaced by horizontal ones in the network society. What needs to be pointed out in relation to Castells’s claim is that the operation of media conglomerates and their social and cultural power is not dependent on the organization of people into a singular mass audience. Of course, major advertisers have an interest in reaching large numbers of people, but they have also long since understood the need to approach their audiences as more selectively segmented groups (instead of “rifle shooting” them), so that these can be exploited more efficiently than before (see Turow 1997). The potential outcomes of the active effort by media marketers to speed up the segmentation of audiences into more and more narrow consumer groups is one aspect of the development of the contemporary global media sphere that is left unexamined critically by Castells. He uses more energy to fight the so-called mass society theory of the media and its concept of manipulated audiences. However, in its place he presents an undialectical image of a contemporary media culture that is more empowered because of new technologies which allow more “activity”. Castells does not take into consideration the fact that many existing audience activities – e.g., enthusiastic participation in on-line discussion groups of reality shows – can also result in the affirmation of the goals of commercial media companies; that is, the creation of an engaged consumer base. All in all, the question of how the mode of production affects media systems as a whole is mentioned by Castells, but dropped from the analysis by switching the perspective towards other, more technology-related themes and their (positive) consequences for human agency.

However, besides Castells's technological thinking, we need to remember another source of optimism in his work. As noted, a distinctively communitarian perspective runs through his trilogy, especially the second part of it (Castells 2004a). Here Castells's main enemies are all those social features which threaten communally formed, strong and durable ties between people. These ties are the basis for collective identity, constituting the sources of meaning for individuals. Looking back on the history, in modern industrial society these foundations were severely undercut by both statist and monopoly capitalist forms of rule – naturally in ways that differed historically and regionally – which, in Castells's estimation, replaced them with identities that were supportive of centralized and rationalized domination. In this sense, Castells's communitarianism is somewhat backward-looking, as it ranks *Gemeinschaft* above *Gesellschaft*. For the same reason, there are also traces of romantic anti-capitalism in his work.

Now, however, the winds have changed. In Castells's view, statism is facing total extinction and monopoly capitalism has given way to a more fluid informational capitalism where big corporations and rigid bureaucratic institutions give way to horizontal networks. As a result, Castells is perceptibly hopeful that his (at times modest, at times more pronounced) communal utopianism now has a much firmer foundation than before. The main reason for his hope lies, again, in new media and communication technologies. Together with another leading communitarian scholar, Robert Putnam, Castells dreads the process of social atomization that accompanies informational capitalism. Both of them link this to the corroding effects of television (rather than to commodity fetishism, as did the members of Frankfurt School). Putnam (2000, 174–180), however, is sceptical regarding the possibility that internet-based communities could ease this situation, while Castells (2000a, 388) argues that “virtual communities seem to be stronger than observers usually give them credit for”, and that “the Internet may contribute to expanding social bonds in a society that seems to be in the process of rapid individualization and civic disengagement”.

Such conclusions have affinities to “right-wing post-modernism”, which is a term that Havers (2003) uses to characterize the ethical aspects of McLuhan's medium theory. Although Castells is not as puritanical as McLuhan (see *ibid.*, 521–522), he is nonetheless a conservative in the sense that he expresses romantic feelings towards old organic communities. However, given that their reconstitution is no longer feasible – because of objective reasons that have to do with technological and economic developments – Castells is interested in new kind of political and cultural attachments that are now formed in “retribalized communities” of the internet (see *ibid.*, 516ff). What makes this moral communitarianism postmodern is the idea that the boundaries between the real and the virtual, also in terms of community formation, have become increasingly blurred as “reality is virtually perceived”. There is therefore no need to lament the loss of organic “real” communities of the past too much. This is another reason for a renewed hope, and it also explains Castells' surprisingly Baudrillardian remarks at the end of his chapter on media and technology.

Here we come to a major contradiction that characterizes Castells's work (see also Robotham 2005, 111–113). On one side is his technological determinism which is



underpinned by a neo-Schumpeterian understanding of how the prime mover of society – the process of technological innovation – creates new production paradigms to which societies have to adapt to in order to survive. Thus a strong technological imperative guides his analysis. However, this is tempered by his communitarian belief that the social consequences of this systemic logic can be shaped culturally for the better, albeit within limits. Now we can fully understand why media and communications are so central for Castells. They stand in the absolute centre of the theoretical model that he uses to chart present-day global techno-economic developments (for which new information and communication technologies are essential); they form the main threat to the viability of the society (the legitimization crisis produced by political cynicism, fed by traditional one-way media and communications); and they represent also the hopes that the negative aspects of social change that follow can be cushioned culturally to the maximum extent possible (the renewal of communal bonds via the new media).

Taken together, these approaches coalesce into an excessively media-centric analysis of contemporary society and culture. Castells is not alone in pointing to such directions; similar themes characterize academic globalization theory as a whole. Two main themes stand out in this regard. First, there is Castells's attraction to changes in the spatio-temporal constitution of the society, which is the hallmark of globalization theory. This leads him to claim that a new "networking logic" is now historically decisive for our global condition, resulting in the shift of power from institutions and social actors to information and communication technology networks. While former social power relations still remain in effect, they are of decreasing importance since even those who are in leading positions have to adapt to the demands of the network whose flows lie beyond their control. The second theme covered by Castells is really an upshot of the first one: the spatio-temporal reorganization of society means also that there are now new sources for identity which can be pursued beyond the confines of the nation state (or any specific locality), patriarchal family and class, especially with the help of "new media". This is a theme that is discussed energetically by cultural globalization theorists, but in ways that depart from Castells's technological framework (see Chapter 6).

Castells's medium-technological view produces fatal omissions. For instance, Castells has no concept of ideological or hegemonic domination in his analysis of media and communication. Writing of media, Castells claims that "in modern times power is played out in media and communication" (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 138), exclusively so, or at least inasmuch that the media "constitute by and large the space where power is decided" (Castells 2007, 242). Yet "the main issue is not the shaping of the minds by explicit messages in the media, but the absence of a given content in the media" (ibid., 241). Instead of looking at symbolic processes, we need to look at "the materiality of organizing the communication process", i.e., the technology itself at the basis of McLuhan's claim that "the medium is the message" (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 142). While the question of ideological domination indeed cannot be used as the only source to account for the reproduction of the social order, neither will it do to bracket it off in the manner of Castells. With such a view it is difficult to understand why one can find in the media systematic patterns in the production of meaning in the service of dominant



social relations (Wayne 2003, 178–179). This is all the more confusing since Castells (2007, 238) himself notes that “the fundamental battle being fought in the society is the battle over the minds of the people”, and that this battle “is largely being played out in the processes of communication“, especially the media which “provides the support for the social production of meaning”. This implies an analysis of media as instruments of ideological domination and the institutional and deeper structural reasons for the particular symbolic forms that are manifested. Castells, however, does not pursue this line of analysis, since it would call for a critical analysis of mode of production vis-à-vis the media and not the examination of how modes of development change the media and communications sphere, which is his main trade in this context.

The broad canvas that Castells uses for his portrayal of the network society gives an impression that he has included political, economic, cultural and technological forces in it in a thorough and balanced way. However, a closer look reveals unsymmetrical features. While he offers something for everyone, he offers more to a reader who believes in the radical novelty of the new media, technological explanations and network optimism. His trilogy as well as his more recent writings offer considerably less for those (e.g. Van Dijk 1999) who are interested in the political, social and economic embeddedness of global media and communications networks.

In particular, Castells (2000a, 17–18) eschews the critical analysis of how “dominant spheres of society (for example, the production process, [and] the military-industrial complex)” shape technology. Instead, he concentrates on the question of how “modes of development shape the entire realm of social behaviour, of course including social communication” and how this produces “historically new forms of social interaction, social control, and social change”. These forms are all connected to the dynamism of informationalism and new media and communication technologies. Castells assesses their social consequences optimistically especially because they betoken the end of grand totalitarianisms of the industrial society and their negative characteristics: one-way communication to anonymous masses, statist forms of governance and increasing political indifference among the populace.

By concentrating on these issues, Castells is astonishingly indifferent to another form of instrumental domination (the perusal of which also might account for the perceived political indifference): economic power. Castells (in Rantanen 2005c, 138) notes that “if I had to choose now which to oppose, capital or the state, I would still say the state”. Why should he make such a contrived choice, which stands in contradiction to the principles of critical theory and Enlightenment thinking, to which he otherwise subscribes (where the ultimate goal is the attainment of freedom from *all* forms of instrumental domination)? Besides biographical factors, there is a theoretical reason for this. Castells’s neo-Schumpeterian theory of the informational society makes him privilege all those social, economic and cultural processes that carry on technological innovation as the engine of history. At this particular historical conjuncture, statism has proved itself to be inadequate to the task, while capitalism has entered a new dynamic

phase, fuelling technological innovation and entrepreneurialism; for this reason, it is to be lauded. It promotes a transhistorical development.<sup>12</sup>

While Castells in principle considers the analysis of specifically capitalist dynamics as essential to the understanding of the genesis of the network society, it is sidelined by his interest in the informational mode of development that he finds more compelling than the concept of mode of production. Sometimes Castells even suggests that the separation between these two categories is absolute – such as when he discusses two instances of mode of development, namely industrialism and informationalism. The first is “oriented toward economic growth, that is toward maximizing output”, while “informationalism is oriented towards technological development, that is toward higher levels of complexity in information processing” (Castells 2000a, 17). In another text, he ruminates, somewhat incongruously, on the possibility that “the new economy” might “well outlast the mode of production where it was born, once capitalism comes under decisive challenge and/or plunges into a structural crisis derived from its internal contradictions” (Castells 2000c, 11). All in all, the rhetorical structure of Castells’s argument is typically such that he mentions the issue of mode of production merely in order to push the technology-based novelties of a new informational mode of development to the forefront, as if these represent a dramatic flight from the logic of capitalism.

As Wayne (2003, 45) notes, Castells’s “mode of development [is] like a new mode of production which has transcended the antagonistic contradictions of capitalism”. Castells claims that the network society is based on a new logic of informationalism, propelled by a range of advancements in information and communication technologies. However, much of what he singles out as its central characteristics can be entirely understood from a perspective that highlights the defining features of capitalism. These features are not some vestiges from the industrial era, but principles that remain operative also in the key areas of the “informational society”. In order to discuss this, we must keep in mind the fact that capitalism is a historically specific societal formation in which “instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system” (Polanyi 1957 [1944], 57). This produces a host of imperatives, the central one of which is the need to commodify as many aspects of human life as possible (ranging from the fulfilment of material needs to social and cultural life) in a continuous search for new areas of accumulation and profit. The principle of profit accumulation, in turn, requires a set of social relations, namely, the division of people into those who own property and resources those who do not, for it is only in this way in which fruits of labour may be appropriated in the interests of capital.

12 In this way, Castells’s conceptualization comes close to what Wood (2002, 11–17) calls the “commercialization model” of economic history, which sees that the structures and dynamics that Marxists associate with capitalism (as a distinctive historical phenomenon) have in fact existed since the dawn of humanity. Thus “people, it is assumed, given the chance, have always behaved according to the rules of capitalist rationality, pursuing profit and in its pursuit seeking ways to improve labour-productivity”, “developing productive forces, albeit with some major interruptions” (ibid., 16). On the other hand, Castells’ hatred of state-governed social organization has commonalities with the so-called new class theory “which focuses on the repressive power of welfare state bureaucracies”, conceived as the primary enemy instead of capital (Garnham 2000, 96). I will address these ideological undertones of not only Castells but also globalization theory at large in the last Chapter that deals with the linkages between globalization theory and neoliberalism.

While this dichotomy has been called into question on the basis of its simplicity, the fact remains also today that certain groups of people have more power than others to decide what is being produced and under which conditions.

From this it follows that many of those issues that Castells views as examples of a new logic of informationalism are in fact connected to distinctively capitalist dynamics. For instance, Castells's claim according to which we can now see a shift of power from a class of capitalists to informational labour must be called into question on the basis of the observation that top executives in corporations still determine the overall goals of their organizations, which must be coherent with the goal of accumulation for the sake of accumulation. Similarly, the network structures and cultures of innovation – however flexible and decentralized – have to be contained “within the bounds of property relations” (Garnham 2004a, 174). An important instance of this are intellectual property rights, the current practices of which have extended the ownership of knowledge and information – which are potentially free to everyone – by the employer and capital (May 2002, 72–73). Castells (2004c, 158) proposes that “the New Economy” is based on a “culture of innovation”, “sharing of information” and “win-win strategies” which allow creativity to flourish and without which modern corporations cannot survive. This “open-source culture” is “characteristic of the new form of productivity growth in the New Economy”; it “changes everything in terms of property rights, intellectual property, everything” (ibid.). This management-style optimism ignores the fact that there are precise limitations and barriers for exchange and free flow of information, knowledge and culture. These limitations are organically present in competitive markets. Due to the persistence of former property relations and the drive to accumulate, they will not disappear mysteriously because of some new “spirit of informationalism” (see Garnham 2004a).

Even the very dynamism of the “Information Age” with its new technological forces is suspect as a novelty, since the “emergence of new modes of development has from the very outset been an integral feature of the modern capitalist mode of production” (Smart 2000, 56). How these affect the society are known aspects of Marx's thought, including the need to extend social relations in time and space through communication networks (see La Haye 1980). Again, Castells (e.g. 2000a, 13ff) shows sporadic awareness of such matters, but he does not discuss them further in a historical frame. What I would then argue is that all the comments, critical or otherwise, that Castells makes concerning capitalism and its salience (not to speak of its intensification) are merely gestures that do not arise organically from his theory. He is not interested in capitalism as a historically specific socio-economic system and the specific social problems that arise from it. Because of the avoidance of this peculiar mode of production, Castells has to look elsewhere for solutions.

While Castells (2001c, 67) is critical of the present form of neoliberalism (“high-tech archipelagos surrounded by areas of poverty and subsistence around most of the planet”), he finds that neoliberal restructurations of the world economy have been unavoidable (such as the promotion of deregulation by the state, since this promotes innovation) (see e. g. Castells and Himanen 2002, 54–55). Thus he seeks a path between the Scylla of “unfettered info-global capitalism” and Charybdis of “great disconnection”

from capitalist globalization (Castells 2001c, 72). Castells's solution is partly cultural: he abhors the cultural individualism that accompanies the informational economy and wants it to be replaced by a more communal ethos (a capitalism with a human face, so to speak).

However, as noted before, even Castells' communitarianism is deeply medium-technological, since he highlights the role of new media and communications technologies in the renewal of community. Castells's belief in their transformative capacities reigns over all other considerations. In line with his idea that the mode of development is analytically more important than the mode of production, Castells (2001c, 72) writes that especially new information and communication technologies have properties that "could yield their promise of a virtuous interaction between the power of mind and the well-being of society". In fact, for the author, this utopia is not an other-worldly one: it has already materialized in the case of Finland. "The Finns have", Castells (2001c, 72) writes in a manner that is guaranteed to make them blush with pride, "quietly established themselves as the first true information society with one website per person, internet access in 100 per cent of schools, [...] the largest diffusion of computer power and mobile telephony in the world, and a globally competitive information technology industry, spearheaded by Nokia". Besides these technological achievements, a most impressive thing is that Finland has "kept in place, with some fine-tuning, the welfare state" (*ibid.*).

One does not need to be overtly dismissive of the positive aspects that Castells refers to here (wide internet access, for example), but his rhetoric contains seeds of empty jubilation. The weakness in Castells's analysis is contained in his claim that the Finnish welfare state has merely been "fine-tuned". As to what lies behind this choice of words, Patomäki (2003, 142) refers to a study conducted in 2002, which "confirms that inequality in Finland rose significantly during the latter part of the 1990s". Together with growing capital income shares (especially for top Nokia executives), one of the "main explanations is the declining trend in the average real disposable income of the continuously high number of unemployed households. Both of these are also due to policy changes: tax reforms and welfare benefit cuts have contributed to these main causes of the rising inequalities and exclusion." Furthermore, the decline of equality started in Finland precisely in the early 1990s, when its government started a series of neoliberal restructurations that have undermined the previous welfare state model. In this, Finland is following the same path taken 10 to 20 years earlier by the United States and other advanced economies. This decline will not vanish no matter how innovative the Finnish hackers may be and no matter how many hours the people may spend on-line or speaking on the cellular phone.

One can only conclude that Castells's analysis here is founded on a "one-sided necessitarian logic" (Patomäki 2003, 140). For him, the main economic course of events is a given; as for the social consequences, one can only hope that they are not "taken to the extreme" and concentrate on the best examples of how these extremes have been resisted. This point is more general. Castells's famed trilogy and his other recent writings suggest that the author is consistently painting a far too rosy picture of economic and social developments in the contemporary world. It does not occur

because of some vacuous attitude (although one can see that Castells is as equally “tired of pessimism” as is Beck, another theorist of the second modernity and globalization). Behind this tendency lies a more fundamental theoretical choice, namely the reluctance to consider forms and sources of economic power critically and, as its parallel, medium-technological optimism.

A final remark concerning the nature of Castells’s work as a critical theory is called for. For Castells, the logic of “creative destruction”, now best represented by new information and communication technologies, is so powerful that it defines the realms of the possible in social, economic, political and cultural contexts. Thus Castells seeks a technological fix for problems that arise from the way in which social relations are organized in capitalism – problems that have increased and indeed globalized in the last couple of decades – rather than calls for a transformation of those social and economic structures. This lies beyond Castells’s sociological imagination; by the same token, he does not have an idea of systemic reform of media structures, besides offering comments which chart the technological characteristics of the internet and other so-called new media, as if these would cancel deep-rooted structural features which determine the new media and communication technologies as well. For these reasons, I conclude that Castells’s work in general, and his work on media and communications in particular, fails to fulfil its potential. It is not an uncritical theory of the society, social communication and their globalization, but unfortunately remains an insufficiently critical theory of them.



## 5. MEDIA AS LIFE: SCOTT LASH AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL ORDER OF GLOBAL INFORMATION CULTURE

“The growing integration between minds and machines, including the DNA machine, is cancelling what Bruce Mazlish calls the ‘fourth discontinuity’ (the one between humans and machines), fundamentally altering the way we are born, we live, we learn, we work, we produce, we consume, we dream, we fight, or we die”. This citation is from Castells’s (2000a, 31) *The Rise of the Network Society*, but it could equally have been written, in terms of its substance, by Scott Lash. For Castells, however, the theme of human-machine confluence is only a side path in his study of global information networks and flows, whereas it is of essential importance for Lash’s account of “global information culture” (Lash 2002). It is a culture constituted not only of informational networks and immaterial flows, but also of “technological forms of life”. According to Lash, our “mode of doing things” has become so intensely mixed up with technological systems that previous boundaries between the subject and the object or humans and machines are crumbling (ibid., 13, 15). The consequences of this development are analyzed by Lash in terms of how it affects social structures, culture, production, power, politics and the possibility of doing critical theory.

Castells and Lash are both sociologists of a new technological order, but there are differences in how they approach it. Lash can be described as an abstract social theorist in the best and worst sense, while Castells relies more on empirical examples and less on abstruse philosophy. As Lash agrees, they both approach similar developments, but Castells “doesn’t really theorize” them (Lash, in Gane 2004, 979). Both of them are interested in what is radically new in society, economy and culture, but Lash is more prone than Castells to underscore the intensity of social and cultural change without making any qualifications. What is crucial for Lash’s recent work, above all, is the idea of de-differentiation: the fusion of culture, society, economy and polity into one overwhelming technological system on a global plane. Of course, Castells’ “network society” is also a marker for such de-differentiation, but he discusses its features systematically in the context of different spheres of social and cultural life, thus preserving at least a semblance of their relative autonomy. For Lash (2002), the fusion has become so immediate that he no longer analyzes the new situation from such a perspective; instead he starts from the logic of information culture itself, unfurling for the reader a number of philosophical concepts and themes as an intricate constellation that is intended to illuminate the different shades of that ubiquitous logic.

There is much similarity in the concepts and the arguments that Castells and Lash employ, especially if we look at their work in the 1990s and thereafter. I will note those similarities later, but this is not what I want to highlight here. Instead, I will first concentrate on how Lash has developed his technologically based arguments more recently. In a certain sense, they represent a radicalization of Castells’s analysis of the network society and also of Lash’s earlier work concerning increasing reflexivity and a new kind of symbol economy (Lash and Urry 1994). This happens in a way that takes its cue from phenomenology, existentialism and poststructuralist philosophy, to name just some of Lash’s theoretical influences. The reason why Lash is relevant for my discussion

is that he borrows heavily from medium theory and puts media and communications at the centre of his work. As Lash notes in an interview (Gane 2004, 93), “concepts like ‘communication’, ‘information’, ‘life, and ‘media’ now do the same sort of work that postmodernism did for me in the late 1980s”. In addition to these, Lash’s work is strongly associated with the concept and mainstream academic theory of globalization, as he too makes the argument that we have moved from a “national manufacturing society” to a “global information culture” characterized by communication and informational flows (Lash and Urry 1994; Lash 2002). Taken together, these themes examined by Lash offer an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the media and communications has been incorporated into social theory at the moment when its key concept, society, is deemed to be obsolete (see Gane 2004; Outhwaite 2006).

## 5.1 Lash’s Oeuvre

Lash is professor of sociology in Goldsmiths College, University of London and at the time of writing, also the project leader for its media research programme. He is first and foremost a theorist of social and cultural change, always “up-to-date” on shifting impulses in social theory and commenting on emerging features of social and cultural life, whether they are new methods of production, new technologies or new sensibilities. Although he has a remarkable understanding of the history of Western social and philosophical thought, Lash is not dealing with history or history of ideas as such: he uses classics side by side with more contemporary thinkers to assess recent developments. Lash’s style varies somewhat. In his own monographs, he is very theoretical (at times lucid, at times rather esoteric), whereas in books written together with John Urry he also deals with empirical material (stemming from secondary literature), which he offers as substantiation of his more general arguments. Empirically grounded or not, Lash is, like Castells, working within the parameters of *zeitdiagnostische Soziologie*.

What is characteristic for Lash is that since the late 1980s, his books have been constructed around dualistic models or dichotomies. He has written about the shift from “organized” to “disorganized” capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987), from the modern to the postmodern (Lash 1990), from fordism to “economies of signs and space” (Lash and Urry 1994), from modernisation to “reflexive modernisation” (Lash 1994a) and, as noted, from the “national manufacturing society” to the “global information order” (Lash 1999; Lash 2002). Names and concepts vary but the general tone of his writings stays constant: old analytical models no longer apply, as we are moving into a different era which is rapidly displacing the previous social order. According to Lash, we are witnessing transitions, transformations and reconstitutions of nearly everything in social, political, economic and cultural life, together with the changing status of the modern individual, who confronts new risks but also new possibilities.

Interestingly, but not coincidentally (if we think of the general trajectory of social theory), Lash’s intellectual career has some remarkable points of convergence with that of Castells. As was noted in the previous Chapter, Castells’s most Marxist works were produced in the 1970s and early 1980s when he was dealing with urban sociology and



crisis tendencies in advanced capitalism from a Marxist perspective. While Lash has become a household name in social theory and cultural studies precisely because of his dualistic epochal diagnoses made in the past two decades, his first major published work (based on his PhD for the London School of Economics) was about the issue of class: it examined the question of what factors explain the variations and specificities of working class radicalism and politics in the United States and France (Lash 1984). Lash's answer was that we have to look beyond "objective variables" (e.g., resource distribution or technological change), and pay attention to the ways in which cultural and ideological structures as well as the actual class alliances that were historically formed account for those variations. This work was, according to the author, "profoundly Gramscian" as it emphasized "the role of the party in the ideological war of position against ruling-class hegemony" (ibid., 236).

This work may be seen today as belonging to an earlier epoch where the principles of classical sociology or Marx's analysis of social relations and their association with industrial forms of production were still relatively strong. The next major work by the author, written together with his most important collaborator (Lash and Urry 1987), set out to distinguish a new social order that had emerged in advanced capitalist countries of the West between the 1960s and early 1980s. This study is already an example of theories of "second modernity" or postmodernism (see section 7.3), but still within a framework that claims (although somewhat constrainedly) that the social changes that were taking place in this period are "functional" for the accumulation of capital (ibid., 7–8). Lash and Urry discuss these changes as a shift from "organized" to "disorganized" capitalism. This entails the growth of the world market and "de-concentration" of capital within nation-states, the rise of the service sector and new social movements, the process of de-industrialization and the subsequent decline of the working class in manufacturing, the emergence of "flexible" organizations, and also, from the viewpoint of culture, "an increase in cultural fragmentation and pluralism" and the "appearance and mass distribution of a cultural-ideological configuration of 'postmodernism'" (ibid., 5–7).

Generally speaking, these features are by now widely accepted facts in sociology. They represent common points of interest for theorists of the information society and second modernity, as well as for neo-Marxist researchers. What was distinctive – and at the time, fresh – in Lash's and Urry's first co-production was the way in which they connected cultural changes to transformations in the economy. Despite obvious complementarities, there are differences in their treatment compared to how Harvey (1990) or Jameson (1991) analyze the same issue. For Harvey, it is necessary to state unambiguously that postmodern cultural forms are tied to the changes in regimes of accumulation and that "wherever capitalism goes, its illusory apparatus, its fetishisms, and its system of mirrors come not far behind" (Harvey 1990, 174–176, 344). Likewise, for Jameson (1991, xii), late twentieth-century cultural changes must be linked directly to "late capitalism", since "postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order [...] but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself". These links are slackened in the work of Lash and Urry. They note that the disorganization of capitalism is "inevitably embedded in a *cultural*

substrate” and that there is no “reductionist state of affairs in which postmodernist culture is somehow a reflection of the phase of disorganized capitalism” (Lash and Urry 1987, 286).

This forms the groundwork for Lash’s and Urry’s (1987, 287ff) more detailed description of postmodern culture and its social conditions: the increasing “semiotics of everyday life” (via television, advertisements, billboards, pop music, home computers, etc.); the rise into an avant-garde position of “new bourgeoisie” or “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu) who are predisposed – because of their work as “taste creators” in media, advertising and design – towards the production and consumption of signs; and “the decentring of identity” that springs from the fragmentation of work-based subjectivity as well as from the impact of electronic mass media, especially as it disrupts the sense of time and space by replacing historically grounded narratives with a “largely schizophrenic reality” of media spectacles.

These fragmentations notwithstanding, the political implications of postmodern culture are not viewed in a negative light by Lash and Urry. They belong to a very different camp than American cultural conservatives like Christopher Lasch or Daniel Bell who decry similar features for their underlying hedonism. It also contrasts with Castells’s more muted but nonetheless existing communal romanticism. Lash and Urry (1987, 312) argue that contemporary culture with its “often figural, anti-auratic, electronic and spectacular symbols has had the effect of disintegrating older modes of individual and collective identity”, leading “ineluctably to twenty-first century experience in which a social structure based on massive industrial core working classes, huge industrial cities [and] the capital-labour relationship structuring society [...] have all been left far behind”. In their place, the authors see the emergence of new pluralist forms of politics (less reliant on mass organizations and the principles of class struggle) and “the opening of possibilities for a more universalist and rational subjectivity” (ibid., 299) on a similar postmodern basis.

Such formulations highlight the importance of cultural developments, so much so that they begin to override key points that the authors make in the beginning of the book concerning the relationship between postmodern culture and capitalism in its “disorganizing” phase. To put it briefly, the capitalist mode of production recedes to the background in their analysis. While they initially claim that “capitalist social relations continue to exist” (Lash and Urry 1987, 7), this is then later contrasted with the above-mentioned statement according to which postmodern culture is erasing “the capital-labour relationship” as a structuring factor (ibid., 312). The question of economic determination of culture is left hanging in the air in a fairly similar manner, except for a short remark that postmodernism “articulates with some features of disorganized capitalism”, although (as noted) not certainly “somehow reflecting” it (ibid., 286). On the other hand, postmodernism, and with it, culture, has much weight in Lash’s and Urry’s analysis of the new social formation. It has evident explanatory power, creating new grounds for social identities, experiences and politics.

In his next work, Lash (1990, ix–x, 4–36) continues to define the postmodern as a “strictly cultural” paradigm. From a generally aesthetic viewpoint, he sees that there has occurred a major transformation that forges a gap between the modern

and postmodern cultural paradigm. Modernism, which is associated with organized capitalism, was “discursive”: it gave priority to words over images, sense over nonsense, meaning over non-meaning, reason over the irrational and the ego over the id. The postmodern sensibility is, instead, “figural”: it is visual rather than literary, devaluing formalism and rationalism and privileging immediate sensations and immersion rather than intellectual modes of reflection. Essentially, this analysis relies on a medium-theoretical model that Lash uses in order to understand the historical trajectory of cultural change as a threefold development – as is customary in McLuhan’s work. Liberal capitalism (a period preceding modernism and organized capitalism) was for Lash characterized by oral forms of communication; communications in organized capitalism (modernism) are through printed word; and, finally, in postmodern culture, “images, sounds and impulses” coming from the electronic media are central, or even “the most important fact” in “terms of [their] implications for social relations” and “for relations of domination” (Lash and Urry 1987, 14).

Television, advertising, film, video and other characteristically postmodern media are for Lash instances of a new audio-visual “regime of signification”. With this concept, which is a modification of the concept of “regime of accumulation” (used by members of the so-called regulation school), Lash refers to different modes of cultural production and reception (Lash 1990, 4–5). Lash’s argument is that “the new regime of accumulation [of capital] is becoming itself progressively more and more a regime of signification” whereby “greater and greater proportion of all goods produced comprises cultural goods” (ibid., 38–39). This argument, reworked in countless studies thereafter, is examined further in Lash’s and Urry’s second major book, *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994), which is an important precursor to Manuel Castells’s *Information Age* trilogy and which has many affinities with mainstream academic globalization theory as a whole.

Having already written about the shift from organized to disorganized capitalism, Lash and Urry aim to find a new angle from which to analyze the contemporary moment. This they find in “the ethereal processes of time and space” (1994, 1), especially in the idea of time-space compression and time-space distancing. For Lash and Urry, the most salient fact of the turn-of-the-century reality, not sufficiently analyzed in their previous work, is the prevalence of flows and their increasing velocity. These flows consist especially of “mobile objects” (capital, labour, commodities, information and images) but also “mobile subjects” (labour, migrants). The importance of flows can only be understood “if ‘networks’ are taken into account because it is through networks that these subjects and objects are able to gain mobility” (ibid., 24). New information and communication technologies are paramount in this kind of networking logic: they allow faster circulation and global co-ordination of production and consumption, thus creating the basis for a new kind of “economy of signs and space”. This is to be contrasted with two earlier spatio-temporal orders. The nineteenth-century period of “liberal capitalism” was the era of local markets and relatively small-sized firms whose customers were also locally based. The twentieth century was a period of “organized capitalism” where money, the means of production, commodities and labour-power came to flow most significantly on a national scale. This is the beginning of the

formation of huge companies and firms, the age of rationalized mass production and mass marketing.

From the late twentieth century onwards, the circulation of commodities and money has become international in terms of increases in global trade and global movements of finance. Information technologies are increasingly important in the economy and in the disintegration of Fordist mass production systems (uniformity, standardisation) into “flexible” production systems (small batch production, customisation of commodities, smaller market segments instead of uniform mass markets). The old Fordist economy had the “heavy-industrial hub of the motor, chemicals, electrical and steel industries” as its core (Lash and Urry 1994, 17). The new core, in turn, is “clustered around information, communications and [...] services, such as telecommunications, airlines and important parts of tourism and leisure” (ibid.). Lash’s and Urry’s (ibid., 25) analysis of technological development follows a similar dualist course: “The paradigmatic media of mobility during the epoch of organized capitalism were railroads, telephone via wire cable, postal services and later road networks”. All of these were mainly national in scope, whereas “the paradigmatic mobility media of disorganized capitalism are fibre-optic cable, satellite communications and air transport”, which form the basis for “time-space and time-cost convergence on a global scale” (ibid.). If *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Lash and Urry 1987) concluded with a postmodernist discussion of the radical “disruption of identity” caused by television, *Economies of Signs and Space* points towards computer-mediated-communication and globalization.

According to the authors, the new economy of signs and space is based on the circulation of “mobile objects” and the creation of “reflexive subjects”. Lash and Urry (1994, 12–15) argue that the non-material objects populating the global networks and flows – either “informational goods” with a primarily cognitive content or “postmodern goods” with an aesthetic content – are “emptied out” of both meaning and material content. “What is increasingly being produced are not material objects but signs”; even material objects are infused with sign-values and images (ibid., 15). The claim concerning the abolition of meaning can be understood via a reference to Lash’s and Urry’s poststructuralist influences. They argue, following Baudrillard, that in the commodity culture of disorganized capitalism the material aspects and use-values have become virtually irrelevant. The “sign-value” of commodities has become crucial and, as a consequence, what is consumed in contemporary capitalism are primarily images and not material objects. This points to the epistemological crux of the postmodernist argument, namely, that signs “float free from the referent” and that everyday-life becomes a site for “hyperreality of the spectacle” (Lash and Urry 1987, 288–289). In other words, signs and systems of signs do not represent a reality “out there”; what is more important is that today there is no clear division between reality and its symbolic representation. They fuse together in our semiotically overabundant culture and, naturally, the proliferation of media plays a large role in this process.

This line of analysis leads to a striking argument regarding a shift in the way in which domination works in society and culture:

“modernist domination operates through ‘ideology’, through already abstract ideas (compared to pre-modern affectively charged symbols, gods and demons, etc) such as equality of opportunity and socialism. Their symbolic violence takes place through meanings and functions to reproduce the dominant class in the social. Postmodern symbolic violence is effected through forms which are characterized by very little meaning. The media gain ever increasing autonomy and power with respect to the social. They follow their own interests as a specialist ‘field’ and decreasingly reproduce the interests of the dominant class in the social field.” (Lash and Urry 1994, 16)

Here we have in embryo the argument that is the extensive subject matter of Lash’s *Critique of Information* (2002). The passage has similarity with Castells’s ideas of how domination in the network society is internal to the practices of media. Power is now “out of control” of those who traditionally held power via their social position. It lies instead, as noted previously, “in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives” (Castells 2004a, 425). The shift of power from institutions and social agents over to the immateriality of networks and flows is interpreted by Lash and Urry (1994, 6) as a process whereby national social structures are displaced by “global information and communication structures”. This produces new parameters for human agency. When previous forms of social structure that controlled subjects (class, nation and material conditions of production) vanish, new grounds for identities are created in the process of “accelerated individualization” or “growing reflexivity” on the part of subjects (ibid., 4–6). This is the condition of “reflexive modernization” (a definitive manifesto of which is Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994).

The precise consequences of this condition in terms of how it affects human emancipation and agency are evaluated in two seemingly contradictory ways by Lash and Urry. On the one hand, the “economies of signs and space” are based on “flexible” production systems that accelerate the pace of product innovation and turnover time. Such acceleration necessarily requires the intensification of the processes of attaching sign-values to commodities through design as well as marketing, advertising and branding. These efforts fill the place left empty by the disintegration of traditional social structures (especially class and family), subjecting the postmodern subject to the demands of commodified lifestyles and fleeting consumerist fulfilments as the imaginary foundations of identity. In this regard, Lash and Urry (1994, 133–134) even remark that the autonomous subject of aesthetic modernism is replaced by aesthetic images or “reflexive objects”, not “reflexive subjects”, since humans “tend to become flattened and unmediated” in the process. Yet this line of analysis is for them, in the end, too gloomy, best left to the dystopian thinking of Baudrillard and the Frankfurt School. Leaving the dark clouds behind, Lash and Urry (ibid., 134) return to a more optimistic scenario which they had already presented in their previous work. Referring to “the Marxist left”, “the semiotic left” and American cultural conservatives longing for a “firm set of ‘foundations’ from the past”, they note:

“In our view this spatialization and semiotization of contemporary political economies is less damaging in its implications than many of these writers suggest. This is because the implications for subjects, for the self, of these changes is not just one of emptying out and flattening. Instead these changes also encourage the development of ‘reflexivity’. The modernization and postmodernization of contemporary political economies produce, not just flattening, but a deepening of the self. Such a growing reflexivity of subjects that accompanies the end of organized capitalism opens up many positive possibilities for social relations – for intimate relations, for friendship, for work relations, for leisure and for consumption.” (Ibid., 31)

The reflexive subject, then, exists in the information and communication structures of the “disorganized capitalism”, or is even produced by them. Here it should be noted that in order for this argument to make sense, it requires a positive postmodernist understanding of identity as its background (see Lodziak 2002, 23–26). Lash and Urry agree with Baudrillard that today the construction of identities relies on the exchange of sign-values, so that the consumption of aesthetic products has become a major source of self- and collective identity. A homological structure guides their diagnosis in this respect: if our culture is based on the symbolic and on signs – on the free play and association of symbolic meanings – then the same concerns the subjects themselves. In the condition of postmodernity, the subjects are more reflexive, more image-conscious and more communicative than before, more able to alter and choose their identities. Therefore, “agency is set free from the structure, a process in which, further, it is structural change itself in modernization that so to speak forces agency to take on powers that heretofore lay in social structures themselves” (Lash and Urry 1994, 5).

This is a translation of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* for the age of global information and communication flows, according to Lash and Urry, and it is very different from what early critical theorists (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]) proposed. For Lash, there is no place for a Marxist line of critical theory in today’s world order, which is “informationalized, yet more than ever capitalist” (Lash 1994a, 110). Nonetheless, he notes that social theory should pay attention to the economy and social inequality (Lash 1994b, 215), since not all subjects are equally reflexive. There are now, on the one hand, “reflexivity-winners”: the new middle-class, the members of which have positions as experts, planners, designers and managers in the informational sector, and an educated working class that is responsible for the operation and production of productive technology that supports the postmodern symbol economy. These classes have managed to become essential parts of the new information and communication structures. However, on the other hand, there are “reflexivity losers” who have not gained such indispensability. A new underclass is situated even below the traditional working class population. It is made up of the poor “in the Black American ghetto and the British council estates” and others whose wretched existence takes place in the “dead zones” outside of the brave new world of information and communication (Lash 1994a, 130–133).

This analysis of inequality corresponds with Castells's work in a one-to-one fashion. In it, it is denied that the capitalist mode of production accounts in an analytically relevant sense for the current forms of social inequality. Instead, they are produced by the informational mode of development, which is a separate entity (and yet is somehow related, if only by a vague conceptual association with the word "capitalism").

Lash's and Urry's (see e.g. 1987, 289) analysis of power and inequality is premised on an earlier account of "mode of information" offered by Mark Poster (1984). Poster argues that Marx's concept of mode of production, underpinned by the notion that society is constituted by humans producing useful objects out of natural materials, no longer works. In the advanced informational societies that have emerged in the late twentieth century, such "premise of labor" has to be discarded because "one can no longer assume as a basic paradigm of practice human beings working on things" (ibid., 53). Instead, "labor now takes the form of men and women acting on other men and women, or, more significantly, people acting on information and information acting on people" (ibid.; see also Castells 2000a, 17). This means that we need "a new logic of domination" that is not based on a Marxist understanding of society and the social relations that characterize production processes, but on "the model of technologies of power" that has become prominent in the "mode of information" (Poster 1984, 53).

While Poster, Castells, Lash and Urry use different theoretical ideas in their work, they are all united in their attempt to redraw critical theory and the notion of domination in non-Marxist terms. For them, it is not the differential ownership of means of production and capital that ultimately produces inequalities between people. Their argument about a new logic of domination makes two fundamental claims. First, domination is viewed as one aspect of how information and communication technologies affect society. The development of these technologies follows a relatively autonomous dynamic, compelling all subjects from above, so to speak. Second, even though all social actors are affected by this dynamic, some suffer more as a consequence. Inequality is produced by the incapability of certain groups to include themselves in network structures of the "mode of information". Conversely, the possibilities for the attainment of emancipation are not to be found by looking at the mode of production as the site of antagonism. Instead, they can be uncovered by assessing the mode of information and its inherent dynamics.

Following this understanding of social change and its implications, Lash proposes that the proper point of departure for critical theory today is not the critique of ideology but the critique of information (Lash 2002) (I will discuss this in more detail later). This claim is made in the course of another argument, already outlined by Lash in his previous book *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality* (1999). Both of these works aim to go beyond currently influential theories of "second modernity". For Lash, the first or "simple" modernity is an era constituted by industrial capitalism and the Enlightenment. It is a paradigm of human society based on the idea of progress, order and "determinate judgements" (Kant), which "subsume a particular under a universal, the *a priori* categories of reason" (ibid., 2). To use another philosophical category, simple modernity is governed by instrumental rationality; accordingly, "social actors come under the sway of pre-given rules, whether in the norms of modern institutions and organizations like mass trade unions and political parties or large hierarchical firms,



or the institutions of the welfare state, and the church and family” (ibid., 3). This is to be contrasted with “reflexive modernity” (or “second modernity”). It is a social order in which principles of simple modernity (norms, instrumentally rational institutions, faith in progress, etc.) break down or are in decline. The void thus created forces individuals to “find the rules to use to encounter specific situations” (ibid.) – that is, to live with risks, ambivalence, contingency and the absence of collective norms that guide action. This sociologically defined reflexivity has as its parallel also a cultural form of reflexivity that is based on the recognition of difference that deconstructs universal notions of identity.

After offering this by now familiar dualism, Lash offers another characterization he distinguishes from both first and second modernity. He argues that we have now moved into “the global information culture”, which “is *not* a third modernity” and which is “vastly different” from either modernities (Lash 1999, 12–13). It is “a multimediatized cultural space of not difference or perplexity or ambivalence, but instead of *indifference*” (ibid., 11). It is no longer human subjectivity that is decisive – whether understood as the autonomous agent of the Enlightenment or as the situated subject of postmodernity – in “the era of thinking, calculating, information-rich and design-intensive non-humans” (ibid., 12). In Lash’s account, human culture is replaced by a technological culture that is global in its proportions. This also means that shared or contested meanings, the realm of the symbolic and imaginary, are no longer important. They are “exploded into fragments and disseminated outside of the subject into the space of indifference in which they attach to a set of humans and non-humans, to objects of consumer culture, to images, to thinking machines, to machines that design” (ibid.).

By making these kinds of arguments, Lash puts forward a highly speculative theory of social change. It comes up also in his *Critique of Information* (Lash 2002), which has been hailed as “one of the most ambitious and provocative works on the theory of the global information revolution to have appeared in recent years” (Sandywell 2003, 109). This book is of interest to the present study as an example of contemporary social theorizing which discusses media and communication technologies as the fulcrum of changes in society, culture and human (or, allegedly, “post-human”) existence at large. The discussion so far has pointed to the theoretical repertoire that informs Lash’s analyses. His arguments are rooted in postmodern thinking and the theory of information society, but he also tries to develop them further by mixing them, in particular, with Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, Paul Virilio’s theories of speed (“dromology”) and Gilles Deleuze’s neo-vitalism (see Lash, in Gane 2004, 92, 94; Lash 1999, 265–311; Lash 2002, *passim*). What unites these French impulses is Lash’s philosophical interest in “the nature of the object” and in the “paralysis” of subjectivity as it is “bombarded by signal-objects in electromagnetic fields” (Lash 1999, 344).

Lash’s recent work is philosophical (in a decidedly metaphysical sense) in its mode of address. He also comments, however, on issues that are of interest to sociologists and media theorists. The questions that Lash takes up are basically similar to those that Castells discusses in his trilogy: how have social structures changed, what is the scope of human agency, how should domination be conceptualized today, what are the consequences of globalization and mediatization of every-day life and what is the



relationship between technology and culture. However, there is also a difference, or at least an attempted difference, between Lash's *Critique of Information* and Castells's trilogy of *The Information Age*. Sandywell (2003, 109) notes with regard to Lash's book that if it "is received as another account of the electronic flows and circuitry of information age it will be misunderstood", for it is "a highly original exercise in critical theorizing". The question that needs to be asked, however, is whether or not Lash wanders, in his desire to reach beyond charted waters, into imaginary realms of virtuality that are too far removed from existing social realities. There is an urgently apocalyptic tone in Lash's writing. According to him, the humanity has been thrown into a "vortex of disaster" where "fears and dangers" of second modernity have already "become realized" (Lash 1999, 12). Sociology has to take stock of this situation, lest it becomes "increasingly irrelevant" (Lash, in Gane 2004, 96).

Before I evaluate Lash's claims, let us take a closer look at the overall intellectual construction to which they belong. I will next go through Lash's main points in two sections. First, I will look at Lash's view of power and his concept of "informationcritique", which he offers as a correction to traditional critical theories of domination. This theme is closely related to another concept, namely, "technological forms of life", which Lash uses to discredit former sociological and cultural perspectives of how society, culture and human subjectivity should be understood. In the second section, I will discuss briefly Lash's treatment of media and "media theory [as] the paradigmatic form of thinking in today's global information society" (Lash 2002, 65).

## 5.2 *Critique of Information: Power and Technological Forms of Life*

Lash's *Critique of Information* (2002) is a book built on a paradox that seems to undermine its own foundation. The author claims that in today's informational culture, "deep meaning disappears" (ibid., 17) and that "there is no time for reflection" (ibid., 3). Texts of all kinds and even social theory have "become objects in today's generalized global networks of flow and dispersion of the whole variety of objects" (ibid., 77). It requires no stretch of imagination to notice that these references to the flow-like character of culture and the end of meaningful narratives have also deeply affected Lash's argumentation. The author makes an effort to divide his book into different sections that cover specific themes, but his presentation is unsystematic and highly associative, with the result that it ends up being far from coherent. Individual chapters are essayistic and they could probably have been organized in many different ways. Lash develops his main ideas in various parts of the book, visiting and re-visiting the ideas of a considerable number of social and cultural theorists, past and present, in diverse contexts. Yet the arguments that he makes revolve around some basic points that are endlessly repeated in new variations, mostly in short assertive bursts. The style of Lash's *Critique of Information* is often hurried, terse and impressionistic, as if his sentences were being produced by a nervous machine caught up in the whirlwind of an accelerated society:

“Superman, who was an extra-terrestrial, was faster than a speeding bullet. Technological forms of life are quick too. They are sometimes as fast as the speed of light. They are faster than a metanarrative. [...] Technological time doesn’t so much refuse metanarratives; it outpaces them. Technological time doesn’t so much question progress; it is too fast for progress.” (Lash 2002, 18–19)

I think that there is more than a faint echo of McLuhan in Lash’s associative style, which is similarly intoxicated with new (media) technologies. The citation describes the way of life in the “global information culture” that is governed by three logics, according to the author. First, in line with the mainstream academic understanding of globalization, Lash notes that “national economic, political and cultural relations are in decline and being displaced by global flows”. Second, manufacturing gives way to the logic of information in production. Production is being informationalized and has become less labour-intensive (and more knowledge- or design-intensive) than before; moreover, what is produced in “cutting edge sectors like microelectronics and biotechnology” are no longer objects, but instead “artefacts”. Third, “the social is displaced by the cultural”, by which Lash means that former social institutions and structures are being dismantled and are taken over by flows, which are for the most part comprised of symbolic or cultural goods. Additionally, with the decline of social institutions (political parties, church, family, etc.), the importance of social norms declines and we witness a rise in the importance of cultural values (Lash 2002, 26–27).

These themes have been discussed not only in Lash’s earlier work. They have been dealt with – in various forms – by a whole array of globalization theorists, including the pre-eminent work by Castells. If *Critique of Information* were only about the informationalization of the economy, the withering away of nation states or electronic networks and flows, it would offer relatively little. Lash tries to stimulate this debate by digging deeper into the implications of technological change in the age of global flows, starting with the issue of power and the redundancy of the concept of ideology.

Lash opens *Critique of Information* by asking the question: “is a critical theory possible in the contemporary information society?” It doesn’t take too long before he answers this, stating that “critique has always involved a transcendental, another separate space from which critical reflection can be launched. My argument in this book is that such critique is no longer possible”, because there “is no escaping from the information order, thus the critique of information will have to come from the inside of information itself” (Lash 2002, vi).

What does this bold statement mean? It means that Lash wants to dethrone “traditional” *Ideologiekritik* with his version of “informationcritique”. He argues that the former programme “suited much better to the constitutive dualisms of the era of national manufacturing society” (Lash 2002, 9), where there existed a plane from which it was possible to launch criticism of power and its ideological representations in the name of some “transcendental realm”. Interestingly, Lash refers here not only to the legacy of Marxism but also to Foucault, because the latter – who was certainly no traditional critic of ideology – treated power as a discourse which is “linear and

continuous" (ibid., xi). For Lash, however, power has become "a lot more elusive in the information order". Thus he does not subscribe to Poster's (1984, 54) claim that "the logic of discourse/practice finds its justification in the proliferation of information technologies". In contrast to this, Lash claims that power today is not discursive, but "informational" (Lash 2002, 189). Power is no longer a matter of ideology or discourse; it is a technological fact of life (information and communication structures command our existence) to which we orientate not as rational individuals but as individuals who experience these information technologies in their sensuous and tactile immediacy and omnipresence. Lash advocates a shift from rationalistic epistemology to "technological phenomenology" (ibid., 156–175). The latter does not deal with mirrors of nature or representations (as the former does) but, instead, with "fields" in which experiencing subjects operate.

Lash (2002, 1) claims that ideologies, in the sense understood by earlier generations of critical theorists, were viewed as narratives that claimed universality and which "incorporated reflection and indeed needed time for reflection". What he argues is that now such distance has been lost. If "simple" modern forms of life were organised culturally around narratives and discourses, in the age of technological forms of life these are compressed into "abbreviated units of information" which are "non-linear" (ibid., 18). The break with linearity occurs as communication and culture "speed up". This forms the basis for the argument that "technological forms of life are too fast for reflection" (ibid.). Whereas discursive knowledge was "valid over large stretches of time and space", information has "no meaning at all outside of real time" (ibid., 145). As information compresses in time and space, ideological metanarratives implode into immediate events, "signals", that soon pass into oblivion and are replaced by others. Ergo, there is no more time and space for ideology and its critique; they have been eradicated because of the immense velocity of information and its immediacy.

More recently, Lash (2007) has worked on this theme in the context of cultural studies. He argues that the core concept of cultural studies, hegemony, has lost its former relevance as power is now "post-hegemonic". In the version of hegemonic domination that has been developed in cultural studies on the basis of Gramsci's work, domination refers substantially, but not exclusively, to ideologies and discourses, to public representations that possess collective efficacy. Hegemony does not rely on direct manipulation but on more indirect cultivation of beliefs that serve to legitimate the current social order. While this takes place in all major social institutions, the media is an essential site where the winning of the consent of the dominated groups is practiced on a daily basis, both intentionally and unintentionally, and in complex ways that link up civil society, the state and the market.<sup>1</sup>

But this does not account for the current paradigm of power, according to Lash. He suggests that cultural studies should look for its core concepts outside of its Gramscian inheritance. For him, the essential replacements can be found from a perspective that sees power not as an "epistemological" issue but as an "ontological" one. In this model, power is not conceived as a hegemony that some leading bloc exercises over

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the media is also a site for counter-hegemonies, that is, for attempts to amplify the more revolutionary sides of the necessary contradictory common sense (partly dominated by hegemonic representations, partly dominated by experiences of being downtrodden) among the subordinated.

its subordinates via culture and social institutions. It is now “power as force, energy, potential” (Lash 2007, 59). Post-hegemonic power “penetrates your very being”; it is “the motive force, the unfolding, the becoming of the thing-itself, whether that thing is human, non-human or some combination thereof” (ibid.). The critique of ideology and hegemony was possible when power was conceived as being practiced from the “outside”, as a process of normalization of subjects who, in turn, could resist and unmask this process on the basis of their situated experiences and understandings. Not so anymore, Lash argues, since in the post-hegemonic order, “power enters immanent to life and forms of life themselves” (ibid., 61) in all their diversity. Because of this, it does not make sense to search for an “inside” and an “outside” in the field of domination. The distinction between the ruler and the ruled has disappeared. Power thus evades the practice of *Ideologiekritik* and the theory of hegemony, both of which cling to that outdated dualism.

From this perspective, then, meanings, representations and texts are not proper targets of critique in the current information culture. Domination through representations requires that subjects are socially situated (Lash 2002, 67). However, Lash claims that humans are now inside a common information and communication structure which sweeps away all social and cultural boundaries that existed hitherto. This includes also social class, which has little relevance for the analysis of power relations in the information society (Lash 2007, 69). In his comments on this question, Lash (2002, 4–5) revisits some of his earlier analyses of inequality, noting that power and inequality can no longer be conceived as issues that are tied to the instrumental domination of labour as a commodity. Instead, the global information order is based on “exclusion”, which refers to the position of subjects in relation to global information and communication flows and networks of technological innovation. Thus the crucial distinction should not be made between owners and workers, but between global informational elites whose members compete for positions in transnational labour markets, and “a forcibly excluded underclass” whose members have become increasingly irrelevant as both producers and consumers (ibid., 5).

This distinction follows, according to Lash, from a change in the process of capital accumulation. In the manufacturing economy, accumulation related to the ownership of means of production as property (machines, plants, etc.), whereas now it relates to “means of information” as intellectual property (Lash 2002, 194). The economy as a whole is now less labour-intensive and more knowledge- or design-intensive. This undermines Marx’s original labour theory of value. In the era of mass production, workers were exploited in order to create surplus value, while in the era of flexible production, “it is the [intellectual] property itself that can create the surplus value” (ibid., 196). In other words, in information societies, the process of capital accumulation and valorization does not require the exploitation of labour, which occurs as a result of ownership of real property; what it requires today is a legally enforced system of trademarks, patents and copyrights which excludes others from valorizing prototypes, brands and other forms of intellectual property that command the global economy.

The key point that Lash wishes to make, via references to Deleuze, Antonio Negri and Donna Haraway, among others, is that commodification in information societies

does not refer essentially to industrial products and labour as “dead” and “mechanical” things. It is “life” itself that has become a commodity, via biotechnology and intelligent information technologies. Today production concerns the production of new forms of life as “neo-commodities”: machines that think or genetically engineered organisms that are conceived as information systems, designed and redesigned with the help of computers and databases (Lash 2002, 198–199; 2007, 70). These are reflexive objects, “objects that judge” (Lash 1999, 275), in a much more direct sense than Lash and Urry (1994, 133–134) had previously suggested.

With such swinging technological changes, everything is subjected to fundamental reconfiguration in the global information order. This is conceived by Lash (2006a, 326) metaphysically, as a manifestation of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s (1983) “desire” which “replaces labour as the driving force of contemporary capitalism”. He (2006a, 326) argues that capitalism today “works from a principle of life” and not from a principle of capital accumulation. The global information order reflects the importance of becoming, movement and action (not being, stasis and structure). He thus rejects all those sociological schools that refer to relatively stable social structures and their reproduction. For Lash, the whole notion of reproduction is in dire crisis. Discussing the work of Alain Touraine and Pierre Bourdieu, Lash (2002, 214) notes that

“in previous social arrangements – feudalism, industrial capitalism, communism – pivotal social processes were inscribed in a paradigm of reproduction. In the synchronic of any given previous form of society there was reproduction. Only in the diachronic, the transition from one mode of social life to another, was there significant change, was there production. It is only in the post-industrial societies, in globalized modernity, that the synchronic is no longer characterized by reproduction, but instead by chronic change and instability, by chronic innovation, in a word, chronic production.”

In effect, Lash claims here that there is no longer such a thing as reproduction of capitalism as a social system. In its place, we have a contingent and complex entity (“global information order”) which is constantly in a state of flux. This order is less secure than its predecessor. Due to the speeding up of technological forms of life and because of constant change and instability, social planning and rational control of development becomes impossible. The world becomes unpredictable and even the basic laws of cause and effect shatter. The global information order has no centre and no clearly defined determinants, apart from proliferating technologies themselves: “Technological time outpaces the determinancy of causality; it leads to radical indeterminacy, to radical contingency” (Lash 2002, 19).

Technology has traditionally been understood in sociology as practical systems and means of production that are embedded in social relations. For Lash, such a concept is hopelessly antiquated. The point is not to analyze the interaction between technology and society – a concept abhorred also by Latour (2005, 2–5) and Urry (2000a) – especially if this is done by granting analytic primacy to the latter. The crucial thing is

to realize that social relations have become technological through and through. They have been transformed into “socio-technical ties” which are held together especially by communications (Lash 2002, 20). An entity that used to be called society is now a system made up of “technological forms of life”, a concept which refers to “conjunctions of organic and technological systems” (ibid., 15). These forms make the social order possible today, an order which is less reliant on stabilizing institutions and norms than before.

Because of the amalgamation of technology and society into “technological forms of life”, it is no wonder that Lash expresses his discomfort with many generally used names for the social formation that is claimed to have emerged after “simple” or “first” modernity. He prefers the concept of “information society” to “postmodernism” since the latter deals “with disorder, fragmentation, irrationality, whilst the notion of information accounts for both the new order and disorder that we experience” (Lash 2002, 1). Continuing this battle of definitions, Lash also strikes a blow against Giddens’s “late modernity” together with Harvey’s work on “postmodernity”. These concepts are for him “amorphous”, while “Information is not” (ibid., 2). However, Lash also finds “information society” to be deficient, as he wants to separate it from the ways in which it was previously understood (and this must include some of Lash’s own versions as well), that is, from its association with “knowledge-intensive production and a post-industrial array of goods and services that are produced” (ibid.). This view is for Lash too rational, for it fails to account for the “incredible irrationality of information overloads, misinformation, disinformation and out-of-control information” that flow in plenty in the networks of “disinformed information society” (ibid.). Once again, this argument reflects Lash’s interest in the radically contingent nature of the global information order with its “chronic” instability and risks (Beck 1992). However, it also connects to a distinctive understanding of how the relationship between human subjects and objects should be conceived.

“Technological forms of life” refers to the fusion of frameworks of action (technology fuses with society) and actors themselves (human agents are fusing with technology). In his arguments on the latter conjunction, Lash borrows extensively from Bruno Latour’s work. He calls into question the previous understanding of human agency by stressing the “new autonomy” of objects that “spin out of control of subjects in their movement through global networks” (Lash 2002, viii). In addition, in an information culture with its intelligent machines, “humans are increasingly *indifferent* from non-humans, from machines and from nature” (Lash 1999, 268). Thus it could be argued, as Latour does, that rights should be given not only to citizens but to things (Lash 2002, 52). However, while objects can now be seen as possessing agency, they are not in the centre of Lash’s theoretical endeavour. Objects do not have a priori primacy in the explanation of information culture, but neither do subjects. As Latour (e.g. 2005, 71–72) argues, in place of subjects and objects we should realize that their place is taken – it has indeed always been taken – by hybrids or “actants”, that is, anything that can be said to be an actor in a given context, such as technology, humans, organizations, symbols, theories, chemicals, automatic door openers, scallops, etc, or their different combinations. Actors are not exclusively conscious beings. The study of “actor networks” refers to the analysis

of associations of different elements that affect, say, the creation of a technological invention, a media text or behaviour in an organization. Lash (1999, 344) argues that:

“In the networks, the actor-networks of the information society, objects and symbols are no longer finalities. The object becomes a terminal, a means of extending the networks. Subjectivity for its part loses its singularity. In the sea of indifference it becomes also a terminal indistinguishable from other actants.”

In this image of the contemporary state of affairs, Lash offers a new version of a “Copernican turn” in the human sciences which forces us, once again, to re-evaluate the human condition. In his Latourian account, humans – who at one time were freed from their submission to deities and demons (through Enlightenment philosophy) and at another, divested of their belief that the psyche revolves around a conscious ego (with the help of Freudian metapsychology) – are forced to face their limitedness in even more upsetting terms. Now they have to take their place “alongside animals, things, machines, nature and other objects” (Lash 1999, 14). Armed with this insight, we can open the gates to a post-human or a transhuman condition.

It should be noted that this line of argumentation takes distance from a postmodern interpretation of subjectivity that stresses cultural difference. For Lash, the existential question of postmodern theory (how is my identity culturally constructed?) does not carry much weight anymore. The politics of difference has lost its former meaning when “there is no longer an opposition between culture and technology” and when “technology and ‘the machinic’ invade the space of culture and the subject” (Lash 2002, 137). Instead of difference, Lash’s new program seeks to come to terms with the consequences of the deep interaction of subjects and technologies, the indifference of these categories in proportion to each other. Besides issues that are crucial for cultural theory, the idea that subjects and objects are increasingly on the same level also has significant sociological implications. For Latour and for Lash (*ibid.*, 63), the question that has vexed sociology – the agency/structure debate – is now irrelevant. Latour eschews the analysis of how social structures such as class, family or the economy shape human action (Lehtonen 2004, 184). There are no universal structures or totalities which account for what goes on in the social world, for there is only an infinity of networks that exhibit associations between various actors whose relative importance cannot be known in advance of empirical study of particular “collectives”.

Another universal concept, globalization, is also rejected by Latour (2004), since “there is no Globe any more, no overarching totality in which to pinpoint the mass of puzzling new events”. The difference between Latour and Lash consists in the fact that the former is interested in the logic of actor networks as particular fields where actants are at play. These networks do not, by any means necessary, have to do with things that are commonly conceived as being shaped like a network with its web of interconnected points (like the internet) (Latour 2005, 129–131). To study the social is to map relations between anything that comprises a whole. Lash takes the concept of network more literally, although he too is interested in more limited actor networks



(such as Research and Development laboratories). Overall, however, the goal of Lash is more universal. He is interested in what is common for all conceivable actor networks as they extend and coalesce into global networks of information and communication (Lash 1999, 345). What Lash therefore highlights is a series of general features of global information culture: “the hegemony flows” and their disembeddedness, the “velocity and long-distance stretch-out of communications that is at the basis of contemporary social life”, and the energetic vitalist drive that somehow animates informational subjects and objects (Lash 2002, 204–205).

Here we come to the interpretation of globalization in Lash’s recent work. In the pages of *Economies of Signs and Space* (Lash and Urry 1994, 279ff), the processes of globalization were still approached from the perspective of culture in a more “traditional” manner. The authors emphasized, among other things, local reception of cultural products and the proliferation of social interaction in enlarged spatial contexts, leading to deterritorialized identities and imaginations. This postmodern emphasis on cultural difference diminishes in Lash’s works published at the turn of the millennium. Thus, in his recent works, the process of the globalization of media is not analyzed as complex patterns of cultural production and consumption, but as a strictly technological issue. He (2002, 149) claims that “culture is all amongst us rather than somehow inside us and above us”, and that “we no longer gain our orientation in the world through the encounter with the dominant narratives in the novel, cinema or television. The global information age is not a narrative but an *object* culture” (Lash 1999, 345).

Apart from theories of cultural globalization (Chapter 6), Lash’s understanding of globalization is also different from the outline offered by Castells, even though they both agree that new information and communication technologies are absolutely central for it. For Castells, globalization is a dynamic process built around a fundamental opposition between “the Net and the Self”, whereby culturally and socially rooted individuals and groups have to face the instrumentally rational and universalizing force of “spaces of flows”. Cultural difference and space of places still exist, although Castells mourns their weakening because of the rise of “culture of virtual reality” (Castells 2000a, 406). In Castells work, the meaning of space of places is always in relation to spaces of flows, which, however dominant they are, do not “permeate down to the whole realm of human experience in the network society” (ibid., 453). The compression of time and space and the new social morphology of the network have limits. But for Lash, there is no outside from which to oppose the Net. In his theory, globalization is conceived as a process whereby “technological forms of life” are lifted out of particular places and exist in “any place or indeed no place”; they are characterized by an absence of identity and context (Lash 2002, 21). Because of new technology, time and space compression comes to an end: human-machine interfaces are not based on relative distances but on immediacy. Technological forms of life

“are *really* stretched out. They are too long, stretched out too far for linearity. They are so stretched out that they tear asunder. Spatial link and social bond break. They then reconstitute as the links of non-linear and discontinuous *networks*.” (Lash 2002, 20)



In the global information culture, subjects are connected directly to a virtual habitat that is nowhere and everywhere. They live inside a generic space (ibid., 21) where consciousness has no independence apart from communication networks. This is Lash's matrix, a new type of post-human civilization in a "flattened, immanent world" (ibid., 178), which is simultaneously a mediated world. Borrowing McLuhan's phrases and his theory that the media are "extensions" of the human sensorium, Lash writes:

"The 'global village' is not just a return to the tribal village on a global scale. It is the 'outering' of the collective 'central nervous system'. 'Electronic technology' 'extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace' [...] Here our sensory network becomes effectively the global actor network." (Lash 2002, 179)

Lash's ideas of globality and globalization resemble philosopher Paul Virilio's (1997, 9–21) claim that new information and communication technologies move us outside of the familiar coordinates of time and space. Kellner (1999, 111) notes that, for Virilio, cyberspace "generates a disorienting and disembodied form of experience in which communication and interaction takes place instantaneously in a new global time, overcoming boundaries of time and space. It is a disembodied space with no fixed coordinates in which one loses anchorage in one's body, nature, and social community." Virilio even exclaims – in a context where he speaks of the importance of "cyberwars" as the latest manifestation of military conquest, now taking place in real time and independent of real space – that "globalisation is the speed of light" and "it is nothing else!" (Virilio, in Armitage 2000; see also Virilio 1997, 18).

Even though Lash does not conceive the issue in exactly similar terms (and as critically as Virilio), globalization is for him as well just another facet of informationalization, swallowing up everything and everyone. It is the process of the extension and speeding up of technological forms of life through networks of communication. In fact, the process of globalization (as understood in mainstream academic globalization theory) reaches an endpoint in Lash's work: spatialization is replaced by a fully realized technological globality. The global information culture is not the modernity of separate spheres, but a technological order that is rapidly de-differentiating itself: "Culture is displaced into an immanent plane of actors attached or interfaced with machines"; "superstructures collapse as the economy is culturalized, informationalized"; "Social relations themselves are becoming less a question of sociality than informationality"; and subjects become "users" of technological systems, fusing with technology (Lash 2002, 9, 75–76). Wherever one looks or moves, one is bound to hit the computer screen; "There is no more outside" (ibid., 220). In Lash's vision of the current world, former key concepts of social and cultural theory are rendered obsolete. Their meaning is destroyed by the fact that they all are aspects of the same pure immanence of all-embracing technological forms of life.

The "technological forms of life" which I have been discussing in the above are equated by Lash with networks and flows, with information technologies and

with communication and media. Lash (in Gane 2004, 97) suggests that “the two words” which “describe what is going on are media (or general mediatization) and communication”. Their salience is visible in culture, social relations, economy, theory and in the transformation of subjects and objects. Even though the importance of media and mediatization in Lash’s thinking has surely become evident by now, this issue needs to be specified. A concise review suffices, since much of what concerns media in particular in Lash’s exceedingly media-centric inquiry merely complements that which has already been discussed.

### 5.3 Media and Media Theory

The influence of McLuhan’s medium theory on Lash’s thinking goes beyond passing remarks offered in the above. Lash’s recent work is similar to what has been claimed of media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s “media materialism”, namely, that it is “pushing McLuhan’s study of media into the digital age so that computers, their storage capacities and their networks are placed in the centre of analysis” (Gane 2005, 29). This comparison is especially appropriate because Kittler’s work has also influenced Lash, who claims that “sociology may arguably begin progressively to be effaced by a general ‘mediology’” or that media theory is “displacing both social and cultural theory” (Lash 2002, 206, 67). What is the substantive meaning of these arguments?

Like Castells, Lash puts forward a medium theoretical understanding of the media and stresses the importance of media-technological change as a decisive force of history. Yet Castells links his analysis to media in a traditional sociological sense, by discussing the ways in which new media technologies affect existing institutions and forms of social and cultural life, including the media industry and media consumption. Media is still for him a social institution among other social institutions, even after the “grand fusion” brought about by the “multimedia system” (Castells 2000a, 394ff). In Lash’s post-millennium analysis, media technologies mediate the social world in far more immediate ways. He claims that we “cannot talk about the media and society any more because the media is in the society” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 97). Due to the general mediatization of everything, “classical social relations have been commuted into much more communicational relations” (*ibid.*). It also means that we confront our environment and can only achieve our sociality through machine interfaces, especially through the “interface with communication and transportation machines” (Lash 2002, 15–16).

According to Lash, the importance of media has increased enormously in the past decades. He notes that the logic or dynamic which now commands our existence was already established in the form of earlier mass media. Now, however, it has “achieved hegemony” in the form of digital media which is paradigmatic (Lash 2002, 65). Media no longer refers to a specific set of institutions, industries and practices; it is reality in its entirety. On this basis, we can understand why Lash claims that social and cultural theory should not “focus on the media as an object of research” (*ibid.*) in a traditional, restricted sense. When media is everything, there is no longer a need for a specific media

studies, which is of course paradoxical news for media researchers. What is needed instead is a general “media theory” that covers all the different aspects of “technological forms of life”, a grand theory for the information age. At the same time, the concept of media is extended:

“What media here means is not just the ‘electronic media of communication’. It is a much wider category. Media theory would not [...] make a lot of sense without the spread of computing (information), the Internet (communication), the coming to a position of prominence of cultural industries, again in the broadest sense; and the proliferation of fast-moving consumer goods, of the global brands. It is all of these that make our society and culture a media society and a media culture.” (Lash 2002, 67)

For Lash, media cannot be approached as instrumentalities. Media are not means that serve the accumulation of capital or the dissemination of bourgeois ideology (the traditional targets of critical social theory of the media). However, nor are they finalities, things without external determination. This is so because there is no duality between the media and what exists “outside” of the media (that which could be called the extramedial; see Mulder 2006, 294). Lash could argue, following Kittler (1999, xxxix), that “media determine our situation”, but he prefers to write that media “make connections”, pure and simple: “Information and communications are the material, the new and third nature [a nature beyond instrumentalities and finalities] of the global information society” (Lash 2002, 68).

In order to reach this conclusion, however, Lash needs a specific perspective on the history of media. He does not opt for a social history of media (e.g. Briggs and Burke 2002) but, predictably, for a medium-theoretical history of media, a model used also by Castells. The crucial distinction that Lash (2002, 69) makes is between media that “operate in the realm of representation” (e.g., cinema, books or photography) and media which are “information machines”. Television is for him the first true information machine. What sets it apart from media of representation is that its characteristic content is not a narrative but information, understood as sounds and images that “decline quickly in value after they are transmitted” (ibid.). Here we return to the general problematic of *Critique of Information*:

“Previously the media’s content was narrative or lyric or surely a ‘deep meaning’. It surely was not a *message*. Only with the new mass media is the content the message, only then is the content information. This is just as valid in the computer age as it was when McLuhan was writing.” (Lash 2002, 70)

For Lash, the main feature of media today (the internet, television, newspapers) is that they are all machines responsible for putting out information in a frenzied tempo. Echoing Virilio’s (e.g. 1986; 1997) analysis of the importance of speed, acceleration and technology, Lash emphasizes that the global information culture is now about

“brevity, speed and ephemerality” (Lash 2002, viii). This is mainly the consequence of information machines. They present media events in real time, 24 hours a day, as short duration messages that are “here today, *gone* tomorrow” (ibid., 73). The media does not represent; it only presents issues as “pure information” (ibid.). For this reason, Lash rehearses a familiar post-modern argument whereby “the television no longer reports the war or even transmits a pro-war ideology, but the war happens on television, politics happens on television” (ibid., 183; see Baudrillard 1995).

As noted, Lash argues that there is no room for ideology in contemporary media culture. The reason for this is that media messages are offered in such a fragmented and fluid form that they have become incapable of carrying meaningful discourse. In order for an ideology to work, it needs to contain at least seeds of rational argumentation (see Eagleton 1991, 14–15). However, this is no more the case, according to Lash, for informational media does not work through discourse but “through the brute facticity of their messages” (Lash 2002, 74). This is to say that ideology evaporates as media content accelerates and condenses, as if Tönnies’ (see Hardt 1979, 142–143) “solid opinions” have now turned into “gaseous” ones permanently. This is the logic of information production and it is mirrored in its consumption. Informational media “descend, so to speak, into the world” (Lash 2002, 71) and as such there is nothing sacred in them. They are profane or even intrusive parts of the everyday-life as technologies. They are like the air we breathe, pollutants included. They “turn up in your house in real time, not in ‘time out’”, working “unconsciously and pre-consciously” so that “you may not trust the papers but you *read* the papers” regardless (ibid.). Media are now received in conditions of distraction – at the breakfast table, in the traffic jam, in and out of work but always in a hurry – and not in situations that leave time for contemplation and serious engagement with arguments (ibid., 74). This is a cultural environment that is unsuitable for the dissemination of ideology and slowly progressing narratives. Technological forms of life provide only for immediate on-line experiences:

“I just can’t function without my WAP mobile phone. I can’t live without my laptop computer, digital camcorder, fax machine, automobile. I can’t function without Ryanair, Amazon.com and my digital cable and satellite channels’.” (Lash 2002, 15)

Finally, we need to note the theoretical ramifications of this general mediatization of life. As for political theory, Lash argues that with such developments, the age of informed political citizen is over. The media does not produce competent citizens who use critical reason in order to contribute to political process and community-building (nation, democracy, the state, the civil society). What is left of society is a “conscience collective” (Durkheim) in the most stripped-down form possible: a community of “communicants” or “nomads” – not the “imagined community” of nationals or global cosmopolitan citizens – joined together only by the “mosaic images” of media themselves (Lash 2002, 184). This is the form of communal existence in the global information culture: “today’s big match”, the “next number one hit” or “this summer’s blockbuster movie” (ibid., 185)

– fleeting media events in which everyone participates as extensions of their lives. This existence is not imaginary; it takes place in the realm of the real (ibid., 186).

In such conditions, Lash thinks that “media theory” comes into its own, separated from a theory of media. Again, he argues that the media does not refer to a sphere that “could be isolated from social as well as economic life” (Lash 2002, 76). On the contrary, the media has invaded the social and the cultural; it has also “become part and parcel of the economic base” as cultural industries (ibid.). Thus, it seems that we do not need special sciences in our explanation of the new media world: it can be analyzed by a general “mediology”. In fact, Lash goes so far as to claim that the principle of media and information is now so dominant that it has “engulfed” theory, too, and in such a way that the former opposition between explanation and interpretation becomes void. Media theory is a theory that is “increasingly like media”: it is just another “variety of information”, produced and consumed as part of constant flow of other texts and certainly with less time and reflection than before (ibid.). Theories are only “a bit longer lasting” than other forms of information but objects they are nonetheless, circulating in the global networks of communication and information (ibid., 76–77). This is another reason for Lash to claim that the critique of ideology has lost its foundation. According to his framework, critical theory is also part of the general informationalization or mediatization of life. Therefore, critique must come from “inside of information” (ibid., 10) and not from the “outside” of the range of issues that it is directed against (as was the case in traditional *Ideologiekritik*).

These are Lash’s main claims. But what are we to make of his descriptions of how the world stands today and the arguments that he advances as substantiations? In what follows, I will concentrate on aspects of *Critique of Information* that I find problematic. These include his vitalistic monism, his unhistorical exaggeration of the novelty of contemporary communication-technological developments, his neglect of the continuation of previous forms of ideology and social power, and finally, his fatalistic embrace of current forms of “informationalized” capitalism that he associates with productive “desire”. All of these points are interconnected via the media-centrism of Lash’s thinking that bears many similarities to Castells, although it springs from a very different philosophical foundation and is more extreme in nature.

## 5.4 Evaluation: The Problems of Lash’s “Vitalist Problematic”

Lash’s work on global information culture is an attempt to rethink social theory in light of new technologies, especially new media and communication technologies. Media and communications is not a new theme for Lash as such; it was already centrally present in his studies from the late 1980s to mid-1990s of disorganized capitalism, postmodernism and reflexive modernization. Overall, Lash’s work of the past two decades shows constant features. It belongs to a wider context, a reaction against previously eminent sociological positions, ranging from liberal-functionalism to academic Marxism. What Lash has focused on, above all, is the claim that the stability of modern structures, norms and positions is now a thing of the past. He has made this claim through

recourse to two currents of thought. The first is the “radical rejection of modernity” (Callinicos 1999, 56), initiated by Nietzsche and followed up in particular by French poststructuralists (and their followers) since the 1960s, who have stressed the process of “infinite movement of signification” as the single most important disruption of solid modern structures and subjectivities (*ibid.*, 274). The second current that has informed Lash is a new type of sociology that has questioned the stability of “simple” modernity by focusing on global movements, flows and information-technological networks that have made societies more complex than before. For want of better words, theories of postmodernity and information society are fused by Lash, as he himself acknowledges (Lash, in Gane 2004, 92).

Yet we can observe a subtle shift in Lash’s theoretical programme more recently. While keeping the former influences on board, he has moved towards what he calls a “vitalist problematic” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 94). He draws from this problematic in order to cast further doubt on such philosophical categories as rationality, reason, critique and an autonomous human subject. These are, of course, key categories of the Enlightenment, which have been under sustained attack in Western philosophy and social thought for a long time. Examples of such attacks are numerous and diverse. For Nietzsche and Foucault, rationality is undermined by “the will to power” which is the inescapable but productive force that drives human existence. Influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger condemned modernity and scientific progress for the moral decay that they had caused – exemplified by the idle talk of the average man in the mass media and the dehumanizing effects of modern technology – but refused his nihilism and hoped for a return to primordial communal ways of life. Deleuze and Guattari produced their own critique of modernity – via a radicalization of Freud’s writings on sexuality – which culminates in the claim that desire flows along “lines of flight” that transcend the normalizing identities that were supposed to curb it. In addition, Latour has more recently suggested that we ought to discard the ontological separation between humans and non-humans, one of the cornerstones of the “modern Constitution”, and come to grips with the fact that “there has never been a modern world” (Latour 1993, 47) of such clearly differentiated entities, but, instead, a more tangled web of relations between “quasi-subjects” and “quasi-objects”.

All of these thinkers have clearly left their mark on Lash’s recent analyses, but we should also note the readings and criticisms that he has made of them. Against Foucault (and his own previous views), Lash emphasizes the non-discursive nature of power, dismissing the notion of multiple forms of domination and the idea that liberation is equal to the free play of previously suppressed identities of all kinds (Lash 2002, vii; see also Best and Kellner 1991, 56–58). For Lash, present forms of power are always reducible to the omnipresent order of technologies of information and communication against which critique cannot conjure up a “transcendental” realm. For this reason, Lash (2002, 8–9, 129) is also dismissive of Heidegger’s search for transcendence in the name of some authentic Being that rises above the banalities of modern society. Together with Heidegger, Lash sees technological culture as our condition; but in contrast to him, he does not pursue a despairing critique of it. Agreeing with Latour’s thinking that goes beyond the subject-object dichotomy, Lash thinks that “technological forms

of life” have forced us to reject former categories of social thought that were based on that dichotomy. Yet this does not mean that we should end the analysis of what exists around us. We should only cease to describe it as modernity, modern society, capitalism or even postmodernity, or whatever name that we have earlier reserved for the social order that is now, according to Lash, more technologically mediated than ever. The global information order is a compelling, epoch-making order that sets tight parameters for critique, which now has to work “without transcendentals” (ibid., 9). But it is also a formation that offers avenues for the broadening of the sociological imagination.

Lash arrives at his conclusions out of the belief that we are faced with a new modality of social change: reproduction of the social order has given way to “chronic” change and instability, to constant production of society. Lash interprets this shift in terms of a vitalist philosophy that sees life as “becoming”. He notes that “the currency of vitalism has re-emerged in the context of a) changes in the sciences, with the rise of ideas of uncertainty and complexity b) the rise of the global information society”, which is characterized by “action over structure, of *flow* and *flux*” (Lash 2006a, 323). Lash’s arrival at full-fledged vitalism or, in fact, neo-vitalism, completes his journey out of academic Marxism. In *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Lash and Urry 1987) and in the *Economies of Signs and Space* (Lash and Urry 1994), the authors were still interested in temporal shifts inside the capitalist mode of production. However, in the latter work (ibid., 1), Marx was mainly credited for his famous vision of the bourgeois epoch as the generator of “uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions” and “everlasting uncertainty”, whereby “all that is solid melts into air”, notions that, taken out of context, can easily be fitted with the vitalist philosophy of becoming. In *Critique of Information* (Lash 2002), Marx is firmly a man of past history, relevant only as the counterpoint of everything that is distinctive about the current informational epoch.

Lash’s current embrace of neo-vitalist principles has consequences that need to be evaluated critically. What I want to note, for a start, is that *Critique of Information* is an exercise in highly monistic thinking. Lash (2006a, 324) notes himself that “vitalism normally presupposes philosophical monism”. An important indication of this in his work is the whole conceptual apparatus that Lash uses to analyze the global condition. There is enormous overlap in his key concepts, to the extent that they seem to be entirely interchangeable. Media is information, information is globalization, society is technology, culture is information, economy is culture, culture is technology, media is technology, media is society, to name just a few of his equations. Yet we should not be puzzled too much by these parallels. Everything is certainly not reducible to everything else and there is a logic that penetrates the reductions that Lash makes.

In the end, he finds that a study of new media and communication technologies, their qualities and the consequences of their omnipresence offers the best basis for establishing new rules of sociological method. “There is a vast mediation of everything”, Lash (in Gane 2004, 97) argues; in other words, the general process of de-differentiation to which he constantly refers is produced by “media” (see Lash’s definition above) and best analyzed by experts of “mediology”. If we agree with this, we only have to look at how this mediation is manifested more precisely as a set of overriding features that are contained within current media and communication technologies: their organization as



networks and human-machine interfaces, the way in which they provide for immediate communicational relations, the high velocity and brevity of information, the constant flow and mobility of information and cultural goods, etc. All of those things that contradict these primary features – such as stable social structures, cultural differences, ideology, narratives – are of less analytical value, if not entirely non-existent. They are instances perhaps of lost “ground” (Lash 1999, 5–6), the reflections of which recede fast in the rear-view mirror as we accelerate away, only to be remembered through the work of mourning (Lash 2002, 140).

We cannot deny the very real tendencies that Lash describes. When he (2002, 75) notes, for example, the presence of “fast-moving consumer goods, the quick cutting and mix and match of dance music [or] 30-second TV ads”, he refers to what anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) has described as the “tyranny of the moment”. Eriksen argues that in information society, fast time has made slow time a scarcity, and with it also security, predictability, stable personal identity, coherence and understanding, cumulative linear growth and real, un-mediated experiences (ibid., 30). He looks at the long history of media and communication technology and claims that the history of modernity can be assessed as the history of acceleration. Referring to Virilio (and in agreement with Lash), he notes that the velocity allowed by global telecommunications and media is now so great as we live “in an era with no delays”, an era of “placeless and immediate” communication (ibid., 51–52). Eriksen discusses a wealth of examples of how speed has killed slow time: whereas in the 1950s relatives separated by the Atlantic had to wait for a return letter for three weeks, now we “wait impatiently for the reply 30 seconds after pressing the ‘Send’ button on the screen”; unlike letters, e-mails are written quickly “with half-baked sentences and bad grammar”; a study from the early 1990s shows that media-exposed children in the United States have incredible short attention spans; and another study made in Norway demonstrates that “the average politician spoke 50 per cent faster in 1995 than his or her predecessors did in the mid-1940s” (ibid., 58–71, *passim*). Quantity destroys quality and fast time wins. There is more information around, in tremendous quantities, and the short gaps of inactivity that people have in their on-line existence (both in work and leisure) is soon filled with the scanning of e-mails, SMS messages or urgent news updates. They all privilege “the fastest and the most compact media”, undermining context, linearity, narrative and understanding (ibid., 70, 76), exactly as Lash argues in his book.

Eriksen’s descriptions are evocative and suggestive. He (2001, 147–164) exhorts us to fight against the tyranny of the moment and engage ourselves in the protection of “pleasures of slow time”. This requires both personal attitude changes and legal measures, such as the creation of mobile-free zones in cities. By contrast, Lash does not write of such deliberations, no doubt because such projects are premised on the existence of an “outside” of informational society. For him, there is no outside, as he makes very clear in many parts of *Critique of Information*.

Or is there? It can be argued Lash is exaggerating due to both logical and historical reasons. If one were to take the key arguments that Lash makes literally, then a critique of his “informationcritique” would be difficult indeed. An assessment of his predicaments would require that one still operates on the traditional level of ideology



critique or epistemology, in which it is essential to look at whether his assertions represent reality or whether they are obscuring it or even mystifying it. However, this is to do something that Lash wants to exclude in advance. If one were to read *Critique of Information* as an example of those processes that Lash describes, then one would go through it quickly as a piece of academic “media theory” – which, however, would not really rise above the phenomena it tries to uncover and which, therefore, soon loses its interest and is replaced by another emphatic depiction of information society. One should remember that “there is no time for reflection”. To note this is to refer to a recurrent problem in social theory. All those models that claim that some condition or form of domination has become total – whether it is “one-dimensional society” (Marcuse), “power” (Foucault) or “implosion” (Baudrillard) – run the risk of arriving at a “performative contradiction” (Habermas 1990, 119–120). This is also what happens with Lash’s theory of the “global information order”. In this case, the basis of total domination is found in technologies, not in instrumental rationality. Domination, as conceived in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, for example, assumes that we see subjects in relation to objective power structures (whether they are material or discursive) and think that those structures are open to change, hard though this may be. However, Lash claims that domination is now practiced by objects themselves: “It is the objects that become structure, that possess agency” (Lash 2002, 63). If there is no distinction between structure and agency, can there be transforming practices; indeed, can there be politics? Lash seems to think that there is, but I have my doubts, since his idea of the nature of politics in the information order seems to leave very little actual scope for it (see below). Be that as it may, I maintain that Lash’s informationcritique is a contemporary example of a type of theory in which it is claimed that human beings have (once again) lost their status as agents of social change, in front of some cast-iron logic.

#### Questioning the Novelty of New Media

I want to continue this discussion later, but before doing so it is important to note another argument that supports the claim that Lash is exaggerating. While I noted that Lash’s analysis of contemporary era is extremely monistic, it is also founded on a dualist theory of modern history. Of course, a comparison between historical periods is often revealing. In sociology, this is often done in order to open our eyes to what is specific for the current moment. This is the core of *Zeitdiagnose*. Lash’s model has some heuristic value, but there are still problems with his absolute distinction between “national manufacturing society” and “global information culture”. This occurs because of his medium-theoretical sketching of how history has evolved. In his model, as noted, the chief distinction is made between media or representation (cinema, books) and media of presentation (television, the internet). The model assumes that narratives have been surpassed by information, linearity by non-linearity, reflection by rush, distance by immediacy. The main impact of this for critical theory is the insignificance of ideology.

This leads us to the question of historical novelty. I do not think that this question can be sidestepped by stating that “new or not”, “this is our world” (Castells 2000b,

367), for our understanding of how the present society and culture is constituted is dependent on our understanding of history. Lash's claim is that we should understand the shift from industrial society to information society as the substitution of one type of media and communications technology with another. These have led us to technological forms of life, global information culture, disinformation, non-linear power, etc. Similarly, Poster (1995) – in his treatment which makes many of the same claims that Lash later elaborates – sees a revolutionary shift in the turn from the first media age (the broadcast model) to the second media age (decentralized, digital media). Out of this emerges “an entirely new configuration of communication relations” which causes “massive cultural reorganizations”, “a reconfiguration of the categories of individual, social and machine” and “a fundamental reconstruction of critical theory” (ibid., 3–4, 19–20). Both Lash and Poster note briefly – but without further specifications – that there are continuities between the two media-technological stages; indeed, they reckon that the former electronic mass media were already signs of things to come. However, this recognition is no hindrance to claims such as: “the media age only becomes established with the convergence of media, computing and telecommunications” (Lash 2002, 66). Furthermore, the novelties of media are celebrated by both of them as finally demonstrating that the Enlightenment-style media critique no longer applies and that the new age is best explained by poststructuralist and post-humanistic theories, mixed with McLuhanian medium theory (see Poster 1995, 52–53, 75–77; Lash 2002, 176–202).

I think it is instructive to pay attention, in this context, to earlier theorizations of mass media. What these suggest is that the qualities that Lash and Poster discuss as the distinctive features of new media era were already, to a significant extent, associated with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century media. The writings of the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) are a case in point. Cooley noted in 1909 that “the changes that have taken place since the nineteenth century are such as to constitute a new epoch in communication, and in the whole system of society” (Cooley 1962 [1909], 80). The general effect of modern communications technology is connected, according to Cooley, to four factors: “Expressiveness, or the range of ideas and feelings it is competent to carry. Permanence of record, or the overcoming of time. Swiftiness, or the overcoming of space. [And] Diffusion, or access to all classes of men” (ibid., 80–81). Here, Cooley encapsulates many themes that have become recurrent in contemporary discussions of media and globalization. He continues his globalization theory *avant la lettre* by writing about “the present regime of railroads, telegraphs, daily papers, telephones and the rest” in a way that is worth quoting at length:

“It is not too much to say that these changes are the basis, from a mechanical standpoint, of nearly everything that is characteristic in the psychology of modern life. In a general way they mean the expansion of human nature, that is to say, of its power to express itself in social wholes. They make it possible for society to be organized more and more on the higher faculties of man, on intelligence and sympathy, rather than on authority, caste, and routine. They mean freedom, outlook, indefinite possibility. The public

consciousness, instead of being confined as regards its more active phases to local groups, extends by even steps with that give-and-take of suggestions that the new intercourse makes possible, until wide nations, and finally the world itself, may be included in one lively mental whole.

The general character of this change is well expressed by the two words *enlargement* and *animation*. Social contacts are extended in space and quickened in time, and in the same degree the mental unity they imply becomes wider and more alert. The individual is broadened by coming into relation with a larger and more various life, and he is kept stirred up, sometimes to excess, by the multitude of changing suggestions which this life brings to him." (Cooley 1962 [1909], 81–82)

Notwithstanding the fact that the belief in the progress caused by the media is more subdued in contemporary writings – but certainly not non-existent, as will be noted later – there are important precursors here to Lash's and Poster's descriptions of "global information culture" and "the second media age". Cooley's bewilderment about the overcoming of time and space is soon followed by another theme that is also raised by Lash and Poster. Both of them insist that spatial and temporal extension is not really the issue; instead, the main question is how electronic communication changes the condition of subjectivity through intimate connections with media technology. Cooley (1962 [1909], 80) maintains that modern forms of communication deserve "careful consideration not so much in their mechanical aspect, which is familiar to every one, as in their operation upon the larger mind". Taking a look at what kind of subjectivity new communication technologies promote, he writes that "the man of our somewhat hurried civilization is apt to have an impatient, touch and go habit of mind as regards both thought and feeling. We are trying to do many and various things, and are driven to versatility and short cuts at some expense to truth and depth" (*ibid.*, 98; see also *ibid.*, 100–101). At another work Cooley (1902, 111–112) writes of "the multiplication of points of personal contact through enlarged and accelerated communication", which produces as its effect "a sort of superficiality of imagination, a dissipation and attenuation of impulses, which watches the stream of personal imagery go by like a procession, but lacks the power to organize and direct it".

The immediate context for the voicing of these concerns was the passing of traditional ways of life and the coming of modernity with its restlessness and more ephemeral social bonds – another key analyst of which was Simmel (1950) – including the popular worry over the mental stress, or "neurasthenia", caused by "the culture of time and space" that emerged in the late nineteenth century (Kern 1983). Similarly, Cooley's comments describe a new kind of individual, moulded by the modern media, whose identity is, using more recent expressions, not only "unstable" or "fluid", but also "reflexive". Lash and Poster might remind us that this figure starts to form precisely in "the first media age". It should be noted, however, that Cooley writes of an era that precedes even the first media age model of radio and television broadcasting. One is left wondering why the reconfiguration of the subject should be deemed with such a force as the specific feature of global information order with its new communication

technologies and poststructuralist trains of thought. Why should our time be called the definitive information age when similar things have been observed for 100 years or more? Even more problematic is Lash's key argument that ideology critique or critical theory is no longer possible in the global information order of the twenty-first century, where every practice is already mediated and the speed in production and consumption of media as well as the sheer amount of mediated content that we have to deal with destroys meaningful narratives and reflection. But has the critique of ideology now reached its impasse? If, as Cooley notes, the early twentieth century already was the era of the individual of "short views, wedded to the present, accustomed to getting quick returns, and with no deep root anywhere", who was "kept stirred up, sometimes to excess, by the multitude of changing suggestions", then it becomes questionable why we should nowadays be confident that the distance needed for critical reflection is somehow lost forever.

### The End of Ideology?

Besides these historical points, there are other reasons for mistrust concerning Lash's argumentation. Lash comes to his conclusions on the obsolescence of ideology by equating the concept with coherence of meaning. Ideologies exist in so far as meaning can be organized into "systems of belief" that claim universality (Lash 2002, 1). His further claim is that the current paradigm of speeded-up informationality does not afford that. There are two objections against this conceptualization. First, modern theories of ideology do not assume that it is necessarily identifiable as a tightly organized system of thought. It has been noted, for instance, that there is no "dominant ideology" as a coherent world-view that is internalized by the subordinated (Abercrombie et al. 1984).<sup>2</sup> Gramsci's discussion of hegemony makes it clear that popular consciousness is a mix of reactionary and progressive ideas – beliefs, opinions and attitudes picked up from the media and the practical life, from the lived and habitual social practices in which people are enveloped (Eagleton 1994, 197–200). There are, indeed, instrumentally rational, institutionalized mechanisms for the production of meaning in ways that serve the reproduction of power and privilege, but the crucial thing is to note that these do not enter into the consciousness and actions of the subordinated as coherent doctrines, but rather, as much more inconsistent units of meaning. Thus there is no need to assume that this process would now be cancelled because of the din and speed of information; hegemonic power is not dependent on the existence of grand metanarratives and slow time.

Second, Lash seems to think that nothing motivates people into action anymore and ideological or hegemonic domination is not needed in any way whatsoever since we all are happy "communicants" punching numbers into the mobile phone and using the personal computer, and nothing else. However, people still act collectively and politically, on various levels and using various methods (not just through writing blogs

2 While Abercrombie and his associates are right to argue about the absence of a dominant ideology in this general sense, more troublesome is their implicit rejection of the study of ideological practices on the whole (see Therborn 1994).

or by sending text messages). A key motivation for this activity is the dissatisfaction with current imbalances of power and their social consequences. Media events and rituals are not the only forces of social engagement, although the enthusiastic participation of the public in them may greatly reduce the need for more drastic forms of hegemonic power. Nonetheless, ideological institutions and dynamics exist because of the fact that societies are based on hierarchical social relations and structures whose existence is experienced, partly at least, as unjust and illegitimate. Modern liberal democracy has one serious disadvantage in the eyes of ruling classes: by giving political rights to everyone, it threatens their capability to uphold asymmetrical power relations. Therefore, there is a need to “take the risk out of democracy” (Carey 1995). This is what lies behind the creation of modern public affairs and advertising, among other institutions, which channel resources into making public attitudes favourable to private power. It is absurd to think that this process has been made unnecessary in the information society, which is certainly not a classless society and more mediated than ever.

Likewise, Eagleton (1976, 90) makes the valid observation that ideologies exists “because there are certain things that must not be spoken of”. At different points of history, elites have set into motion actions that are potentially loathed by the majority. For example, the decision of the Bush administration to embark on the military conquest of Iraq in 2003 with its “coalition of the willing” was based on strategies whose goals were such that they could not be discussed openly in the mainstream media. Thus the administration chose to deceive the public intentionally by concocting a false hunt for “weapons of mass destruction”. As a major study (Moeller 2004) points out, the US and UK media were complicit with this procedure. They “stenographically reported the incumbent administration’s perspective on WMD, giving too little critical examination of the way officials framed the events, issues, threats, and policy options” (ibid., 3). This occurred precisely, in order to use Lash’s terminology, from the “outside” of the general public, which was not “penetrated” by power to such an extent that it could have been trusted to support the war without the necessary illusions created by the government and disseminated in the mainstream news media. The power of this ideological work was demonstrated in the polls shortly before the invasion, making it easier for the administration to proceed with its plans (see Rampton and Stauber 2003, 78–80). Yet it failed later when alternative information became available, resulting in wide-spread disillusionment with the administration (a situation which has required a different set of actions to garner further legitimation for the “war on terror”).

All of this testifies to the continuance of hegemony and not its absolute replacement with what Lash calls “post-hegemonic” power (for a further critique of this notion, see Johnson 2007). It is also difficult to reconcile this very concrete world-historic example to the earlier claim made by Lash and Urry (1994, 16), mentioned above, that the “media gain ever increasing autonomy and power with respect to the social” and that they “follow their own interests as a specialist ‘field’ and decreasingly reproduce the interests of the dominant class in the social field.” In fact, the operation of the media as a “specialist field” does not mean that its workings could not be functional for the dominant class: for instance, “tired journalistic conventions” have been named as the key source for the “poor coverage of WMD” related to the conflict in Iraq (Moeller 2004, 4). Even if the

coverage was constituted of media events and bits and pieces of information that were “here today, gone tomorrow” (Lash 2002, 73), they were still systematic enough to do the trick, insofar as the ideological needs of power are discussed.

What can only be called as Lash’s blindness to these issues must be understood as the consequences of his media-centric, technologically reductionist thinking. He derives the meaning of the word “media” squarely from the technological characters and qualities that it has. What is remarkable in Lash’s work is that he is reluctant to link media with the social world of unequal power relations in any other way than by making a technological reduction. In this, too, he is following in the footsteps of Cooley, whose “intoxication with the possibilities of modern communication” prevented him from exploring “the process by which inventions and mechanical advances in communication were transformed into, or were products of, complex institutions” (Czitrom 1982, 102). Lash (2002, 73) acknowledges that “there are to be sure conventions and protocols for information production” but leaves it at that – barring a suggestion that journalists now work so fast that what is being put out is determined only by the fact that it is news or *nouvelles*. Again, media equals speed. It is almost embarrassing to have to note that not everything that is “news” is considered to have news-value by the major media: even if non-governmental organizations critical of power make every effort to gain publicity in media-sexy ways, they are still under-handed in relation to state and corporate sources who have much better access to the public sphere, for reasons that are evident for anyone who has at least tenuous understanding of the political economy of the media and its hegemonic structures (see e.g. Curran 2002, 148–151).

### The Continuity of Capitalist Dynamics

Another technological reduction worth mentioning occurs in Lash’s discussion of global patterns of inequality. Here we need to recall the crucial points: following Poster (1990), Lash claims that social inequality is determined today by access to global flows of information and communication rather than by one’s position in the globalized capitalist mode of production. Thus he wants to replace a category describing a social relation among those who own and those who do not (class) with a spatial category of “zones” (Lash 2002, 28–29). These refer to a combination of spaces and people inhabiting those spaces which differ from each other in relation to density of flows (of money, ideas, information, images, technology, etc.). Consequently, power relations today are “less [about] exploitation than exclusion. And exclusion is first and foremost something that is defined in conjunction with information and communication flows” (ibid., 4).

What we are dealing with here is a confusing mixture of insight marred by a hyperbole. We can agree with Lash that “exclusion” is indeed a factor in the explanation of current forms of social inequality. Without dispute, “informational labour” (Castells) in networks of research, designing, planning, trading and innovation is in a better position compared with less educated people whose old job options in the “national manufacturing society” (factories, coal mines, etc.) are withering away with automation

and offshoring (Webster 2001, 268). However, this does not mean that exploitation is any less important than in earlier times as a modality of power. The situation is more contradictory, for the workers who have thus been “excluded” or devalued still have to sell their labour-power so as to avoid being relegated into the category of the reserve army of the unemployed. What is different is that this now takes place at a time when working class unions have been weakened, which “drastically improves the conditions for the exploitation of labour-power” (Heffernan 2000, 17) – in services and retail, for instance, which typically offer low-paying, low-benefit jobs. To this development that covers economically advantaged countries, we must also add the fact that over the past couple of decades whole new groups of people in semi-peripheries and peripheries of the world economy have been incorporated into wage labour in industries and services. While poor third world women are no doubt pleased to have the opportunity to work in a factory and receive pay, as it represents an improvement compared to their earlier toil, very direct forms of exploitation, which have no place in Lash’s “informationcritique”, are still the norm in many sectors of global economy such as the “sweatshops” of the third world and of the core countries (e.g. Moran 2002, 11ff; R. J. Ross 2004; Shelley 2007).

Lash also discusses exploitation and exclusion when he writes of changes in the process of economic accumulation. He notes that the key economic sectors of the global information society are involved in the production of symbolic goods that are governed by intellectual property rights (Lash 2002, 143). Following this, he argues that accumulation in the information order is not based on the ownership of real property and exploitation of the workforce, as was the case in the national manufacturing order, but on the rights to exclude others from valorizing the objects of intellectual property (ibid., 193–196). For Lash, these developments seem to signal the end of distinctively capitalist dynamics, not only exploitation but also the accumulation of capital as such, since he maintains that whereas real property is based on that process, “intellectual property is based on the accumulation of information” (ibid., 23, see also ibid., 205).

Some reality checks are necessary here as well. There is no need to deny that intellectual property rights are more important in the economy than before. However, Lash’s idea that as a result, exploitation has ended and that the accumulation of capital has been replaced by “accumulation of information” is strange to say the least. What drives capital accumulation forward is the fact that capital must always seek growth. This is a historically formed dynamic that has taken on a life of its own, working independently of any single capitalist. It means “accumulation for accumulation’s sake, production for production’s sake” (Marx 1973 [1867], 595). The accumulation of capital, of course, is manifested in ways that vary historically, but it refers, first, to trade and to expropriation, the process whereby objects of value (such as land and natural resources) are taken over and transformed into private property. Marx referred to this process in volume one of *Capital* as “primitive accumulation”, a stage in history when peasants and other non-capitalists were divorced from their means of production, often violently, as was the case in colonial conquests and in the so-called enclosure of the commons. This set the precondition, second, for the emergence of capitalist accumulation proper (i.e., commodity production under the “voluntary” conditions of wage labour). Harvey



(2007, 34–35) offers a list of different facets of “primitive accumulation” as discussed by Marx:

These include (1) the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations (as in Mexico and India in recent times); (2) conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusively private property rights; (3) suppression of rights to the commons; (4) commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; (5) colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); (6) monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; (7) the slave trade (which continues, particularly in the sex industry); and (8) usury, the national debt, and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation.

As can be seen, Harvey emphasizes that such “primitive” methods of accumulation are not merely historical footnotes but still very much present in contemporary global capitalism. Thus Harvey (2007, 34) writes of “accumulation by dispossession” as a category that describes both historical and present forms of how assets and resources have been taken over by the wealthy and the powerful. As further examples of mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession that have been opened up more recently, he (*ibid.*, 34–37) offers the privatization and commodification of previously publicly owned assets in advanced economies (universities, telecommunications, transportation, energy, etc.) and the transformation of the global financial regime in the 1970s – led by World Bank, IMF and WTO – which has resulted in the increase of debt and debt crises in developing and newly industrialized countries. These crises have forced many countries in Latin America, Africa and East Asia into accepting “structural adjustment” policies as conditions for getting new loans to offset the economic problems – policies which, among other things, demand reduction in state spending and the privatization of state-owned institutions and resources. Such neoliberal practices, in turn, have often led to the transfer of these resources into the hands of foreign corporations. It is for this reason that Harvey aptly calls the process a “new imperialism” (2003).

Another instance of accumulation by dispossession refers to the area in which Lash is primarily interested: intellectual property rights. The official purpose of present international agreements that regulate intellectual property (especially the so-called TRIPS-agreement which was implemented in 1995) is to encourage innovation and creativity. However, the critical issue is that these agreements enable exploitative practices such as “biopiracy”, which means the “use of intellectual property systems to legitimize the exclusive ownership and control over biological resources and biological products and processes that have been used over centuries in non-industrialized cultures” (Shiva 2001, 49). An example of this is the case of Basmati rice, developed by generations of Indian farmers, which was patented in 1997 by a US company RiceTec Inc. (*ibid.*, 56–57). Even though in some cases (such as in the mentioned one) exclusive



rights to communally created agricultural and medicinal products have later been overturned in the courtroom, the fact of the matter is that multinational corporations use such accumulation strategies regularly.

The point that I wish to make is that all of these various accumulation methods are connected to neoliberal policies that have increased the forceful imposition of market principles in all areas of social life, including knowledge, information and culture. The expansion of intellectual property rights in their current form means, whatever advantages it brings to certain groups of people both in the North and in the South, that a neoliberal conception of knowledge and culture is legitimized and normalized everywhere, resulting in a further penetration of private property into these spheres (Hesmondhalgh 2008, 102–105). In a historical perspective, this represents merely the most recent form of “the enclosure of the commons”; as such, it belongs to a continuum. It is therefore unfounded for Lash to claim that “the new economy is [...] an economy less of accumulation of capital” and that, instead, this new economy now works on the basis of accumulation of information or flows (Lash 2002, 205). Interestingly, Lash makes such claims even after he has briefly discussed Locke’s theory of property – which is one of the key intellectual justifications for colonial conquest and enclosure (see e.g. Wood 2002, 110–115) – and mentioned public battles over the patenting of genetic materials (Lash 2002, 194–200). Yet the issue of “biopiracy” (ibid., 201) is not of much interest to him and he makes no attempt to link his discussion of intellectual property to a discussion of the rise of neoliberalism. Against this background, I argue that Lash’s informationcritique succeeds in obscuring the continuity of capitalist property relations and the processes of capital accumulation. What is more, his obfuscations and evasions are much more elaborate in this sense than those of Castells. Lash is uninterested in those processes, yet prone to declare them simply to be anachronisms.

As a critique of Lash’s theory of global information culture, I think it is adequate to paraphrase Max Horkheimer’s old dictum in order to note that those who do not wish to speak of capitalism should be silent about informationalism as well.<sup>3</sup> *Critique of Information* is especially poor in covering global social inequalities, even though it aims to cover the totality of “global information culture”. It is clear that while Lash (2002, 28–29) registers the existence of “dead” and “wild” zones around the world, these are consequential for him only in so far as they testify to the importance of information and communication networks and flows as the key structuring factors which account for social inequalities both nationally and globally. The problem with this view is that it does not recognize the embeddedness of these factors in previously existing social structures and mechanisms of uneven distribution of resources, which cannot be characterized merely in spatial terms. The fact that poor people living in developing countries are left outside of global informational flows is the current phase in a long developmental history of distribution of newspapers, radio, television, cinema and telephones around the world. This informational unevenness cannot be understood without reference to issues that are sidelined in Lash’s perspective: the history of

3 Horkheimer said famously in 1940 that “those who do not wish to speak of capitalism should be silent about fascism”. Of course, with this allusion I am not suggesting that Lash’s theory has something to do with fascism (or that capitalism should be reduced to fascism) but that he seriously downplays structural continuities of capitalism within his model of new social dynamics.

colonialism and neoliberalism (or imperialism and neo-imperialism) as historically variable methods of capitalist accumulation, including current forms of “accumulation by dispossession”. In other words, informational inequalities are reflections (in a new form) of political-economic factors, not technological ones, which still determine social relations that are becoming increasingly more capitalist throughout the globe. These factors are responsible for both the perpetuation of exploitation of the global poor and also its technological “exclusion”.

### *Critique of Information as Abolition of Critique*

These are social problems of mammoth proportions, related to the workings of global capitalism as a whole. In the face of them, Lash does capture the mood of the moment by claiming that it is hard, or downright impossible, to imagine “transcendentals” that would offer a firm goal for critical theory (Lash 2002, 9). Yet he is not discussing the capitalist world-system here, but the “global information culture”. As noted, he claims that critique today has “to come from the inside of information itself” (ibid., vi), from the inside of a technological order that is all-encompassing. How, then, does Lash answer the question of what is to be done? What is the scope of resistance and politics in the global information culture? Or should we think that it has all but vanished? The idea proposed by Lash that “transcendentals disappear” (ibid., 9) and that critique needs to be fully informational (named by him as “informationcritique, a form of critique that is somehow immanent to the logic of the information society”) is followed by two kinds of conclusions or strategies concerning the above-mentioned questions. The first is what we might call i) the moment of resignation, and the second is ii) a more affirmative embrace of informationalization and its socio-cultural consequences.

Thus i) when “power enters immanent to life” and “domination is through the communication” which is so ubiquitous that it offers no escape for un-mediated, un-technologized cognition and experiences, we can only succumb to the siren-calls of the Nietzschean topos of “*amor fati*”, the love of fate (Lash 2007, 61, 66; Lash 2002, 10, 77). Global information culture is for Lash “irreversible”: it “cannot be wished away no matter how great the longing for a much kinder age of mass trade unions, socialist parties, a formidable welfare state, full employment, comparative income, and the now seemingly gemütlich charms of print culture and the first media age” (Lash 1999, 14). We can be nostalgic and melancholic about the past but there is no going backwards. What this means for critical theory, strategically speaking, is that we have two options, both of which have no connections either to class struggle, critique of ideology or to various symbolic struggles for difference. Thus, if we wish to escape from the new control mechanisms of information society, we can resort, first, according to Lash, to a situationist practice of *dérive* (drift). It is not a form of active resistance or “a ‘voice’ strategy”, but a strategy of “evasion”, “exit” and “movement”, the refusal of automated forms of behaviour and interactivity in daily life (Lash 2007, 67–68). However, one might question how serious Lash is in his exhortations “to slip out” (ibid.) since he has already declared that “there is no escape” from the information order and noted that if

one is indeed left out of communicational flows, this means that one is also excluded and powerless. Consequently, such a move would seem to be ultimately self-defeating.

In fact, his situationist escapades notwithstanding, Lash is really advocating a second, more inclusive strategy for critical social theorists. They have to understand that “the transition to the global information culture” is “the proper study of sociologists” (Lash 2002, 10) and that one should occupy the position of a “witness” (ibid., 201) of these societal developments that cannot really be criticized at all: “Critique may be a question of mapping, of cartography, of a certain sort of sense-making interior to information” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 106). As such, witnesses or cartographers of social change researchers and theorists can and must engage especially with all the industries that are producing “life” and expanding economically such as art, media, design, information and communication technology, software and technosciences (Lash 2007, 74). The post-hegemonic intellectual is “inorganic”, working “less as an organ in the body of social class and more as coders, writing algorithms, as designers and the like” (ibid., 75).

Thus, for Lash it is the NASDAQ index rather than the goals of some collective social movement that gives the theorist his or her bearings. For Lash, Gramsci is truly dead; what he, in effect, is advocating is the capitulation of critical reason and will in front of the current developmental processes of capitalism. Yet he finds, positively, that the inorganic intellectual of informationalism is working in a world of “ubiquitous politics” (Lash 2007, 75). This new form of politics is freed from the shackles of “institutions and their regime of representation” (ibid., 75). Politics in the information society equals a “politics of innovation” (Lash 2002, 139): it is, again, synonymous with and indifferent to the general technologization and mediatization of society and culture. Every instance of production of life is already politics and politics is constantly in the process of becoming, merging with the “rhizomatic networks that dissolve and once again reform” (ibid., 139–140). The indeterminacy that follows from this disrupts even the workings of capital and resists the colonization of the future (ibid., 140).

Thus we arrive at the second aspect of “informationcritique”, which is ii) the moment of affirmation. The proposition that we cannot “get the distance of classical critique” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 106) does not require us to be despairing. Informationalism opens up “a whole array of innovations and creativity” (Lash 2002, 10). This encourages positivity and affirmation of the opportunities that are created by the transformation – “excitement with its possibilities” even as this also means “the death of the human” (Lash 1999, 15; Lash, in Gane 2004, 100).

Here, we should note the peculiar nature of Lash’s conception of critique. One of the facets of the concept of critique is its association with the concept of crisis. This connection goes back to ancient Greek philosophy (Noro 1982, 81). In general, crisis can refer to a turning point or a difficult, undesirable situation (Williams 1976, 85). In terms of sociological discussions, we can think of crises as moments when societal developments prompt heightened critique and reflection. Thus, for instance, critical theory arrived at a moment in history when fascism was arising and Western forms of reason seemed to have entered into crisis (see Horkheimer 2004 [1947]). For Lash (2002, 214), what is in “terminal crisis” today is the reproduction of “both psychic and

social systems” whose formerly stabile features dissolve into radical indeterminacy and “chronic production” (of organisms and societies). But this crisis is something that is not to be viewed negatively and in need of remedy through critique and moral judgements. Basing his perspectives on *Lebensphilosophie* (Nietzsche and Bergson) and Deleuze’s and Guattari’s neo-vitalism, Lash (ibid., 215) argues that reproduction is “life-destroying”, while “production is life-enhancing”.<sup>4</sup> Thus the “crisis of reproduction” is already solved by the global information culture, which is on the side of “life”. Due to this, curiously enough, “informationcritique” seems to lack its object (see Lash, in Gane 2004, 106). Lash’s informationcritique is a very weak form of critical theory. Besides lacking an object, it also lacks a goal, except perhaps for helping “whatever more or less open systems we are in become more open and more reflexive” (ibid., 105).

In his comments on capitalism, Lash makes it clear that it too is today an open system to such a degree that it ceases to be of importance for critical theory. Here it makes sense to compare his views with those of Deleuze and Guattari. For the latter pair, capitalism is a system of social control that attempts to chain desire within the closed and normalizing structures required by economic production. Liberation follows from the “deterritorialization” of libidinal energy from those restrictions and repressions, such as what happens with decentred identities and schizo-subjects that threaten the stability and reproduction of capitalism (Best and Kellner 1991, 85–93). Yet capitalism or the “society of control” is very potent in recapturing and incorporating the attempted subversions within its own dynamic (Holland 1998). Lash sees things differently. According to him, capitalism is less able than before to channel desire within social structures:

“Deleuze and Guattari could be criticized for not going far enough. It is not just the resistance to capitalism which is schizophrenic: capitalism and capitalist power themselves have become schizophrenic. Indeed normalized, or normalizing, capitalism has transformed into schizophrenic-capitalism. This new phase of capitalism is no longer based on the principle of the (mechanistic) commodity. Capitalism itself has become one big desiring-machine.” (Lash 2006a, 326)

In other words, Lash argues that capitalism today generates the very productive desire which escapes the limits of reproduction. Thus we can conclude that for him, the global processes of technologization and mediatization of society and culture are expressions of a “life-enhancing” vitalist force that leads to constantly changing forms of doing things, experiencing and being. The “critique” that he purports to offer is a far cry from the visions of critical theory as previously conceived; as it cannot get distance from what it criticizes, it must content itself with either registering the “chronic production” of society or, indeed, expressing enthusiasm with it.

Such an affirmative theory of technological change, globalization and media technology necessitates some final critical reflections, which I offer in a more

4 These are very vague observations, bordering on the oxymoronic. Of course, the exact opposite also holds: reproduction (of humans or societies, for example) is or can be “life-enhancing”, while production (of nuclear armaments, toxic waste, etc.) can be destructive of life.

traditional tone than Lash. First, we do not need to deny the fact that there are dynamic technological changes that affect the whole world; but neither do we need to think that everything in current societies is about contingency, indeterminateness and life as flux. By concentrating on the constant “production of society” which resists relatively fixed structures and relations, Lash makes the false assumption that the analysis of the capitalist mode of production no longer holds. Yet there are certain invariant elements and relations of a capitalist mode of production that should be taken into account also in contemporary social theory.

As to what these are, we need to remind ourselves that capitalism is an expansive system by its nature, which tries to extend the processes of commodification, accumulation, profit-maximization and competition both horizontally and vertically, to all corners of the world and throughout the whole social order. Marx’s ideas concerning the cosmopolitan character of production and consumption are tendencies “which are only beginning fully to be realized today” (Callinicos 1999, 316). The expansive nature of capitalism drives it also towards obsession with economic growth, no matter what the consequences are in social, political or ecological terms (Harvey 1990, 180; Dowd 2002, 200ff). Second, as noted previously, capitalism is still based on the exploitation of wage labour, and perhaps increasingly so, both because of increasing size of the industrial workforce in East and South Asia, for instance, during the past generation, and because of neoliberal restructurations in the workplace in the core countries which have increased the rate of exploitation both in their industries and in the service sector (Callinicos 1999, 317). Of course, this is not the only recent development in relations of social domination. It is true that traditional industries have contracted, especially in economically advanced countries, together with the weakening of traditional working class unions in those social formations. In addition, new forms of control beyond the exploitation of wage labour have appeared or intensified, such as electronic surveillance of citizens, tougher punishments for crime, collection of marketing data “whenever people shop, travel, pay taxes, register to vote, and so on” (Holland 1998, 71), and the creation of more ubiquitous and more intrusive methods of marketing. Yet such features are hardly alien to the expansive logic of capital accumulation. A third point is that capitalism is a dynamic system, both technologically and organizationally. This is due to its recurrent systemic crises that it tries to overcome by means of either spatial expansion, i.e., the opening up of wider territories to markets and commodification, or “the production of radically new types of commodities”. Both of these strategies require new innovations in production technology, design of commodities and economic management (Jameson 1997, 175–177).

These are all in-built features of a capitalist mode of production, and also sources of dynamic instability in capitalism. Yet the fundamental question in this context is the one made by the theorists of the so-called regulation school: “how does capitalism manage to continue in spite of all these sources of tension” (Webster 2002, 62). It has managed to do this through transformations in the “regime of accumulation”, which, even though they have resulted in historically shifting methods of production and consumption, still leave those basic invariances relatively intact. Thus it is misleading to make an absolute distinction between “reproduction” and “production” of society

in the way that Lash does. “Global information order” is based on the reproduction of capitalist social relations every day. Of course, reproduction here does not refer to the eternal recurrence of the same. Besides a general theory of mode of production, we need to be sensitive to an intermediate level of analysis, to what Callinicos (2005) calls epochs and conjunctures, that is, phases of capitalist development and also more specific historical moments. Lash’s sweeping historical dualism and his claim that we have entered a “post-hegemonic” era allows no such conjunctural analysis, including the analysis of a “new hegemonic moment” that is inscribed in the ways in which Western powers have attempted to consolidate their global political domination following 9/11 (see Johnson 2007, 102ff).

All of this follows from the frame of reference in *Critique of Information* which tends to turn our attention away from relatively stable social structures and forms of domination over to the “ephemerality” of information and communication structures. (By the same token, Lash also collapses culture into technology, a move which is of course highly dubious for more culturally oriented globalization theorists, as discussed in Chapter 6.) The brushing aside of mode of production and its co-existence with new forms of hegemonic political power is the necessary ingredient of Lash’s affirmation of “global information order”. He is enthusiastic with the “new beginnings” (Gane 2004, 3) marked by media-technologically determined social relations (their subsumption with technological “interfaces” and virtual environments), information machines that think and the production of new forms of life in genetic research laboratories. However, his interest in advanced technologies and technosciences, as these manifest the vitalist production of life in a series of exhilarating metamorphoses, is met with silence concerning the production of death and suffering that accompanies global neoliberal capitalism. There is nothing particularly “life-enhancing” in economic insecurity, increasing class polarization, decreasing biodiversity, the export of toxic waste from the North to the South or the production and use of state-of-the-art weapons technology that is intended to eradicate human life even more effectively than before.

To sum up, Lash’s “informationcritique” is both an exercise in resignation and affirmation. It is a form of resignation in the sense that, for him, critical theory is no longer more than a “supplement”; it is tantamount to the act of witnessing or even mimicking ongoing information-technological changes which are self-generating, out of the control of human societies. These changes result in “open systems” which challenge former dualisms that stabilized and reproduced identities, societies and practices of critical theory. Therein lies also the basis for affirmation, for whatever analytically separated spheres there existed (media/society, human/machine, inside/outside, agency/structure, culture/technology, etc.), they all collapse into the same “plane of immanence” of technological forms of life which open up immense possibilities for desire to flow in the absence of former restrictive boundaries and structures (Lash, in Gane 2004, 100–102).

Thus while Lash (2002, 80) eschews the semiotic politics of difference, he reproduces a familiar postructuralist practice whereby emancipation occurs through the deconstruction of “dualisms at the heart of Western tradition, which are typically identified as the malicious culprits behind normalization and the subjugation of the

oppressed” (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 59). Offering guidance for “critical social science in the information age”, Lash (2002, 10) explains that “we need to break with the dualist notions of critique”. In conjunction with this move, existing social relations of capitalist production can be ignored at the time of their intensive globalization. Lash (in Gane 2004, 101) does this in particular by claiming that “the social bond of the capital relation” has been “displaced by the *communicational* bond”. Yet this reference to empirical facts (the increasing presence of media and communications in everyday-life) is made by forgetting the materiality of capitalism, as if we cannot imagine both of these together.

Lash’s “informationcritique” is about the elevation of the idea that everything is now mediated and “become communication in some way” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 97), and that this de-differentiation is the supreme fact of global information culture. This idea is presented in a highly abstract form, but also described as a towering development to which we only have to adapt ourselves. In reading *Critique of Information*, we are faced with a fairly similar philosophical program which Adorno (2003 [1964]) criticized earlier as a source for “the jargon of authenticity”: existentialism as a philosophy of life that is emptied of specific content but which nonetheless demands submission and the rejection of critical reason in the name of some primordial existence (see Lash 2002, 10). There is a strong streak of irrationalism in Lash’s assertion that we have to submit ourselves to the external authority of technological forms of life that now constitute our “fate” (e.g. *ibid.*, 77). Yet even if the current global order is itself irrational (*ibid.*, 2), I see no reason why a theory of it should also be that way.

Lash’s recent work on media, information and the coming global information culture results in the abolition of the concept of critique, the suffocation of sociological imagination and the end of meaningful collective politics.<sup>5</sup> He makes much of the notion that power and domination have now become “non-linear” and “informational”, not dependent on ideological meanings in the service of power. As noted, Lash is unwilling to take distance from the new informational structures and claims that there is no “outside place to stand” (Lash 2002, xii). Once more, for him the problem consists not so much in this alleged state of affairs but more in the ways in which intellectuals fail to appreciate the present condition. Therefore, for instance, Lash (*ibid.*, 113) criticizes Slavoj Žižek for remaining “ensconced in a logic of the critique of ideology”. However, what Lash proposes here in terms of the validity of ideology critique remains ensconced in a postmodern media-centric logic, “a vague and noncommittal suspicion of ideology” (Adorno 2003, xix) if there ever was one. Ideology is much more than a question of representations and meanings (the level of imaginary which Lash claims has now been decimated), for it is also matter of lived relations or the organization of socialization from above (Koivisto and Pietilä 1996, 47). Of course, as noted, one of the reasons why ideologies are still around and why it is still worthwhile to put them under scrutiny is that there exists a discrepancy between what people experience as unjust features of life and how ideologies are for this reason needed (since not all are

5 Ironically, Lash and Urry (1987, 290-291) earlier saw a fundamental flaw in Baudrillard’s thinking, in his notion of “implosion”. Thus they claimed that “if subjectivity is imploded into the unfortunately too lifelike Baudrillardian networks of communication and information, there is little place left from which to launch any type of substantive critique”. This characterization now applies to Lash’s work.

cynics or fatalists) to conceal, suppress and falsify these features. On the other hand, the institutional realm which continues to reproduce an antagonistic social order is in need of change through a critique of ideological forms of socialization and also through the imaging of alternative possibilities. The current social order is marked by serious injustices globally; fortunately, not everyone is willing to cease to think of and struggle for the possibility of “another world”; nor are they ready to embrace their fate in the manner in which Lash suggests.



## **PART III CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION THEORY AND THE MEDIA**

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## 6. NATIONAL NIGHTMARES AND COSMOPOLITAN DREAMS: ARJUN APPADURAI, JOHN TOMLINSON AND THE CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF MEDIATED GLOBALIZATION

In a book that helped to establish globalization as a leading topic in academia in the 1990s, American sociologist Roland Robertson (1992, 183) emphasizes that globalization is not simply an “objective” technological process that is leading to “increasing interconnectedness”, but it “also refers to cultural and subjective matters”. Discussing such “subjective matters”, Robertson (*ibid.*, 6–8) claims that the contemporary historical moment is defined by the intensification of a “global consciousness”. This refers to the notion that today modern human subjects and collectives increasingly see themselves in relation to the world as a “single place”, instead of conceiving nations or localities as their primary frameworks of action and identity. While Robertson does not discuss media and communications extensively in this respect, he makes it clear that “the expansion of the media of communication, not least the development of global TV, and of other new technologies of rapid communication and travel” (*ibid.*, 184), is responsible for the extension of the scope of human imagination. Referring to Anderson’s (1983) classic study that examines the historical construction of national identities (which was fuelled especially by the rise of “print capitalism”), Robertson (1992, 183) writes of a more recent process towards a common conception of “the world as an ‘imagined community’”.

These comments serve as starting-points for the current Chapter in which I examine cultural globalization theory. Robertson’s (1992, 8) definition of globalization, as a twofold process containing both “objective” (“the compression of the world”) and “subjective” (rising global consciousness) elements, highlights the need to think through the relationships between technological and cultural theories of globalization. It is my contention that while the exponents of the media-technological paradigm share common ground with cultural globalization theorists, their differences are substantive; this warrants an analytical separation between the two. The comparison of these two paradigms is conducted in the first section. On the basis of that distinction, I will then deal with key elements of cultural globalization theory as a specific paradigm. As will be noted, there are three themes which are constitutive for cultural globalization theory: a) the notions of deterritorialization and hybridization; b) the critique of the so-called cultural imperialism thesis; and c) the vision of cosmopolitanism. After I have explored these themes from a general viewpoint that stresses the political-normative aspect of cultural globalization theory, I will go through each of them more comprehensively in different sections. The evaluation that follows after that is structured similarly, as it examines critically the named key constituents of cultural globalization theory, each in succession.

In approaching these themes, I concentrate on the work of two noted cultural globalization theorists, namely, Arjun Appadurai and John Tomlinson. They approach the question of how to think culture in relation to globalization from a roughly similar kind of theoretical perspective. Of course, their emphases, their more specific research interests and the concepts that they use vary, but in ways which I find

mutually complementary to my analysis of cultural globalization theory. The different nuances of these authors are related to their divergent backgrounds. Appadurai is an anthropologist with a long track record of studies on aspects of Indian and South Asian culture – with topics ranging from religion, cuisine, customs, sports and agriculture – but also theoretical essays that contain original conceptual formulations. Tomlinson, in contrast, is best known as a commentator on social, cultural and media theory and not as a researcher who has come up with “thick descriptions” of his own. The same goes for the books that are the most relevant ones in the following discussion, namely *Modernity at Large* by Appadurai (1996) and *Globalization and Culture* by Tomlinson (1999a). Appadurai’s book consists of nine articles that express an anthropological interest in the particularities of culture, yet written from a perspective that also provides a more general understanding of cultural globalization. Tomlinson’s work is a critical commentary and synthesis of cultural globalization literature, although he has also tried to introduce new concepts into academic globalization theory.

These differences notwithstanding, it is useful to assess Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s analyses of cultural globalization together in this Chapter. As was noted in the introduction, a) they are widely regarded as authoritative commentators on the topic; b) they are representative, meaning that the discussion of their works helps me to cover the essential dimensions of cultural globalization theory in general; and c) their work is interesting in light of media theory, since both of these authors have incorporated media and communications into their arguments extensively and consider the role of electronic media, in particular, as central in the cultural dynamics of globalization. In my review of these authors, I will not restrict myself to their above-mentioned principle works, but I will also use their other books and articles as source material in order to enlarge upon their main arguments (in addition to taking up ideas from other authors when necessary). Through these strategies I aim to offer a map of cultural globalization theory that remains at an appropriate level of generality, i.e., it maps the main roads but does not get lost in the details of side paths or detours.

## 6.1 The Difference between Media-Technological and Cultural Globalization Paradigms

In the previous two Chapters, I addressed Manuel Castells’s and Scott Lash’s work, which is based on the description and theorization of a new technological order spreading around the world. It is the “network society”, structured around “the spaces of flows” generated by information and communication technologies which dominate economic, political and symbolic life (Castells 2000a, 442). Or it is the “global information culture”, with its “technological forms of life” that have made us all inseparable parts of technological systems (Lash 2002). Such concepts and theoretical strategies are bound to limit the understanding of how cultural identities and differences mediate technological change. We need to note, of course, that Castells and Lash have things to say about culture. The former in fact reserves much of the second volume of his Information Age trilogy for a discussion of identity and meaning. Nonetheless, Castells’s

conception of network society and globalization is such that it effectively results, to use Stevenson's (1998, 472) metaphors, in the "sacrifice" of cultural complexities on the "altar" of informationalism.

This tendency is evident, first, in Castells's (2004a, 1) stark distinction between the "conflicting trends of globalization and identity". According to him, the former process strongly challenges shared meanings that constitute the core of "primary identity [...] which is self-sustaining across time and space" (*ibid.*, 7). Thus, in recent decades we have observed many revivals, sometimes very violent in nature, of historically rooted collective identities and social movements as reactions against the formation of global techno-economic networks. However, these are, still marginalized or at least threatened forms of cultural expression for Castells, precisely in comparison to the potent technological logic of network society. One of its main aspects is the rise of the "culture of real virtuality", that is, the dominant multi-mediated cultural environment which makes the boundaries between the symbolic and the real, and the media and the everyday life, more porous than ever before (Castells 1998, 480–481). The concept of "culture of real virtuality" reflects Castells's privileging of technological developments as it is posited on an assumption that the autonomy of culture vis-à-vis technology has been eaten away in the network society. As for Lash's treatment of the same issue, we need to remember his blanket notion of technological de-differentiation whereby "there is no longer an opposition between culture and technology", because "technology and 'the machinic' invade the space of culture and the subject" (Lash 2002, 137; see also Lash 2007 for his further disengagements from culture in the name of technology).

Such subsumptions of culture into technology are resisted in cultural globalization theory. This sets that paradigm immediately apart from media-technological perspectives on globalization. Yet this emphasis does not mark an absolute distinction. As will be noted in this Chapter, cultural globalization theorists do not shy away from registering the importance of media or information and communication technologies. They share a similar fascination with flows, a key term that litters the pages of all mainstream academic globalization theory, and the general mobility, fluidity and speeding-up of life that calls into question, according to the new sociological wisdom, everything that social and cultural theory once took for granted. However, even if such affinities exist between the two paradigms, they are heavily qualified by cultural globalization theorists. For instance, John Tomlinson (1999a, 21) is quick to point out in his introduction to the concept of globalization that one should not conflate culture with communication technologies. Culture is for him "the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation" (*ibid.*, 18). This cannot be synonymous with "an increase in mobility or even in the 'quasi-mobility' of electronic networks" (*ibid.*, 58). Tomlinson does not deny the importance of technology-induced space-time transformations (see *ibid.*, 47–54), but neither does he single these out as the end-point of his analysis.

Here we come to a crucial marker of difference between media-technological and cultural theories of globalization. For Castells, Lash and also Anthony Giddens and a host of other technologically-minded globalization theorists, the main characteristic of the contemporary moment are the interrelated processes of time-space compression, the

formation of digital networks and the creation of a virtual world that is disengaged from spatial location. What interests these scholars the most is thus a historical comparison between general technological forms of society in its different stages (the differences between modernity and globality, or between “national manufacturing society” and “global information culture”, as in Lash’s studies of the subject). All of the authors stress the common global implications of these processes. Alongside this, they also assign much causal agency to media and communication technologies in transforming society and culture throughout the world. Cultural globalization theorists, on the other hand, want to assess the same technological changes from a viewpoint that is more sensitive to their cultural specificities. This does not refer merely to a mode of analysis which takes into account the local contexts of how technological changes are being played out; it also refers to a more diversified analysis of the cultural logics of globalization. The accent of cultural globalization theory does not fall on “the transformation of our ‘material culture’ by the works of a new technological paradigm organized around information technologies” (Castells 2000a, 28), but rather, on the transformation of symbolic culture, even if media and communications technologies are a crucial part of that transformation.

Following this view, Arjun Appadurai (1996, 5) notes that “there has been a shift in recent decades, building on technological changes over the past century or so, in which the imagination has become a collective, social fact”. Appadurai wants to study this shift and the relationship between technology and culture in a way that is resistant to a “monocausal fetishization” (ibid., 3) of the former. In contrast, he conceives that relationship as a thoroughly dialectical or “relational” matter (ibid., 4). Tomlinson (1999a, 24) is on the same track when he notes (in reference to anthropologist Clifford Geertz) that the analysis of “why culture matters for globalization” does not mean the same thing as arguing that culture is somehow causally responsible for the host of changes that are now under way. To think of culture in such causal terms would push “us towards the confusion of culture with its technologies” (ibid.). Culture is important for globalization, and globalization for culture, in the sense that the processes and contexts through which meanings are created have become more diversified and more culturally interlinked with each other than in earlier times. Culture is a context for action (not a causal agent). Recently, this context has expanded beyond former limitations. This is the basis for a specifically cultural analysis of “the work of the imagination” (Appadurai 1996, 5) or the “complex connectivity” (Tomlinson 1999a, 24–25) of globalization. The other way of saying this is to note that whereas media-technological theorists concentrate directly on the technological form on which globalization is founded, cultural globalization theorists are more interested in probing its various cultural manifestations.

The eye-catching thing about the technological perspective on globalization is that its representatives tend to read off cultural changes directly from the qualities of new media and communication technologies. Giddens (1991, 27), for instance, thinks that the main cultural impact of globalization lies in the establishment of a consciousness of a single world “where there are no ‘others’” – a sense of awareness of distant events and distant others which the electronic media technologies makes possible. For Castells,

as noted, the main cultural development of the turn of the millennium was the coming of “the culture of real virtuality”, including the mediatization of politics and virtual communities of the internet. And for Lash, the essence of contemporary global culture is the speed and immediacy provided by digital technologies that are leading humanity into a new post-human experience. In all of these cases, the cultural dimension of globalization is analyzed by linking it to the allegedly revolutionary features of new information and communication technologies. In brief, there is no cultural problematic of globalization apart from a technological one.

In contrast, cultural globalization theory is a perspective that aims to find precisely such a problematic: its exponents seek to explain culture in cultural rather than in technological terms. In order to understand the full ramifications of this claim – which, of course, sounds merely tautological if left at that – we need to take into account the idea of culture that is dominant in cultural globalization theory, in addition to registering its main areas of interest.

## 6.2 Key Elements of Cultural Globalization Theory

There is a perplexing variety of definitions of culture (see e.g. Worsley 1999; Faulkner et al. 2006). However, we can safely say that the “current tendency is to turn away from the so-called opera-house definition of culture and to use the term in the wide sense favoured by American anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz” (Burke 2005, 120). Geertz (1973, 89) uses the word culture to make sense of “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”. There are a number of important assumptions at play here. First, culture is “democratic” as it refers to “the whole way of life” (Raymond Williams), including formal and informal performances, beliefs, meanings, and other symbolic forms, regardless of what group of people is collectively responsible for them. Second, culture refers to the shared histories of social groups, as they pass on “inherited conceptions” from one generation to another. Third, culture can only be maintained in communication. Fourth, culture is “existential” in the sense that it expresses purposes other than merely instrumental uses of culture (ideology or hegemony), even if these, too, are real. And Fifth, cultures are constantly in the process of being actively created and developed rather than remaining static.

These kinds of definitions open up many possibilities, including mutually contradictory ones, for the analysis of culture, depending on what dimension one concentrates. For instance, Appadurai takes distance from the second perspective on culture, which views it as a property of specific groups, often based on ethnic and, at worst, on directly racial principles. In such a view, culture acts as a “substance” that “appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing, and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated” (Appadurai 1996, 12). Appadurai prefers to see the noun culture or the adjective cultural as heuristic devices

“that we can use to talk about difference” (ibid., 13). According to him, the concept of culture can be evoked in connection to ethnically founded group identities, but in the specific sense which expresses their constructed nature: culture “would not stress simply the possession of certain attributes (material, linguistic, or territorial) but the consciousness of these attributes and their naturalization as essential to group identity” (ibid., 13–14). The next logical step is to see the process of cultural construction in the context of cultural power. Appadurai does this by introducing *culturalism* as a related concept. Through the use of this term he is not referring to an orientation in cultural studies, but to the ideological component of culture: “culturalism”, for Appadurai, “is the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of larger national or transnational politics” (ibid., 15). Tomlinson (1999a, 20), for his part, emphasizes the existential dimension of culture together with its “democratic” aspect, using it to refer “to all these mundane practices [ranging from listening to Beethoven recordings to strolling through the local supermarket] that directly contribute to people’s ongoing ‘life-narratives’” as they struggle to make sense of their “existence in what Heidegger calls the ‘thrownness’ of the human situation”.

How do these different dimensions of culture pertain to globalization? The key thing to note here is that in the writings of cultural globalization theorists, globalization is viewed as a process whose “subjective” dimension is not exhausted in increasing “global awareness”, conceived as some kind of unitary development of human consciousness. More to the point, it relativizes the power of identities and symbolic forms that are determined by ethnic and territorial boundaries. The local or national contexts for culture do not disappear; rather, they are reflexively linked with other cultural contexts. In the conditions characterized as multiculturalism and polyethnicity, “the bases of doing identity are increasingly, but problematically ‘shared’, even though they may at the same time collide” (Robertson 1992, 99). The cultural complexity that follows from this is both “external” and “internal”, occurring between societies and regions and also inside national societies (ibid., 104).

We can define cultural globalization theory as a paradigm whose representatives are interested, first and foremost, in examining and theorizing such cultural complexity. Robertson (1992, 100) notes that globalization is a “twofold process *involving the interpenetration of universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*”. Besides this particular-universal couplet, a more common distinction is made between the dialectic interplay of locality and globality. The cultural paradigm emphasizes the idea that global cultural flows are essentially multidirectional, oscillating between the local and the global, so that both are constantly in the process of being reorganized in relation to each other. Cultural globalization forces local cultures to redefine themselves, either so that the latter try to reassert their “fundamental principles” or so that they absorb some elements from other cultures but retain a degree of autonomy (Waters 2001, 186). On the other hand, if we look at the process from the viewpoint of the other pole of duality, we have to note that globally marketed cultural phenomena are themselves subjected to local needs and preferences. “Global facts take local form” (Appadurai 1996, 18), through “indigenization” (ibid., 32) on the part of



local cultures, or through “glocalization” strategies of global marketers (see Robertson 1992, 173–174).

In this way, local and global cultural influences relativize each other through the fact that they come into contact to an increasing extent. However, there are also reasons to claim, according to cultural globalization theorists, that the versatile substratum provided by globalization results in the proliferation of wholly new cultures, whose features are so transnational or translocal that they cannot be adequately appreciated as constituted by a more or less determinate mix of local and global features.

There is a plethora of closely associated terms that refer to such novel cultures and their constitution, such as cultural “hybridity” (Garcia Canclini 1995), “creolization” (Hannerz 1997) or “global mélange” (Nederveen Pieterse 2004). The implication of these terms is that the interaction between the local and the global has become so intense that they breed a third culture, which is separated from any specific place of origin. The weakening of the ties of culture to place, understood through the category of deterritorialization (Tomlinson 1999a, 29, 106ff), is one of the most important notions for cultural globalization theorists, certainly more important than the idea that cultures have remained territorially autonomous in their constitution.

The claims concerning the hybridization and the deterritorialization of culture are not made for descriptive purposes only, that is, in order to highlight the novelty of certain cultural developments. Underlying these claims, there is also a political interest in cultural domination and cultural power relations. This also accounts, partly at least, for why cultural globalization theorists sometimes write about the resilience of local cultures in the face of global flows, even as they see a definitive trend towards the construction of imaginary landscapes and identities that come loose of place-bound anchors – a process which implies the destruction of the particularly local. The reason for this occasional resort to apparently competing claims is that both of the arguments – for all their mutual tensions (which I will discuss in more detail later) – serve to open up discursive spaces for the recognition of cultural difference. References to the indigenization and localization of cultural influences tones down worries over cultural homogenization, while the concept of hybridization invokes a realm of infinite possibility for cultural variation. The high premium placed on cultural difference is, of course, not limited to the academic subfield of cultural globalization theory, but is a more common trait in social theory and cultural studies at large. All of them have been influenced by the decades-long wave of poststructuralist theory, which privileges the symbolic and the never-ending discursive construction of identity and difference.

Appadurai (1996, 32) expresses his deep concern for such themes when he argues that the “central problem of today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization”. The question of whether globalization leads to cultural homogeneity or cultural diversity is the *raison d’être* for cultural globalization theory as an orientation. Everything within its ambit ultimately comes back to this question, and the very fact that it is presented is significant in itself, even if cultural globalization theorists are ambivalent in their answers. Reading their work, it is easy to find formulations which express the idea that the global cultural sphere is a mixture of both homogenizing and heterogenizing features which “cannibalize

one another" (Appadurai 1996, 43; see also Robertson 1992, 173). Yet when one reads more closely, another common pattern comes into view: they conceive of globalization, putting cultures into feverish interaction with each other, as making possible new cultural expressions, symbols, styles, rhythms, fashions and meanings. Thus, even if "it dissolves the securities of locality, it offers new understandings of experience in wider – ultimately global – terms" and this is "not all bad news" (Tomlinson 1999a, 30).

The belief in the emancipation offered by globalization as it opens up "more complex identity positions" (Tomlinson 1999a, 105) is firm for cultural globalization theorists, although they typically arrive at this conclusion after a list of qualifications. Compared to commentators who harbour fears of cultural homogenization, a breeze of optimism blows through in their writings. However, this positive attitude does not appear without the realization that there are definite enemies which work against it. Cultural globalization theorists have two major opponents, both of which threaten the recognition of cultural pluralism.

The first of them is the ideology of nationalism that is expressed by political movements which adhere to romantic, religious, ethnic or even racial-expansionist visions of nation. The critique against these visions is based on the observation that nation-states have invariably emerged out of some degree of violence, jingoism, chauvinism and the exclusion of the other, and that these traits have by no means disappeared. Apart from openly ethnic manifestations of national ideology, also the Enlightenment view of civic nationalism, the conception according to which nations grant civil rights and liberties to its citizens in exchange for their participation in the maintenance of social order, is suspect for cultural globalization theorists, as it, too, rests on the notion of exclusive loyalty to the territorial nation.<sup>1</sup> According to the cultural paradigm, the hopes of pluralism are in jeopardy both due to the rise of fundamentalist movements and because their opposite force, the Enlightenment project with its rules of rationality and universal morality, has become anachronistic in the world of multicultural differences. Furthermore, the model carriers of that project (pretensions included), the liberal democracies of the West, are themselves far from being safe from "ethnic primordialisms", which are "more alive than ever" (Appadurai 1996, 144; see also Appadurai 2006).

The second opponent of cultural globalization theory is not marching in the streets, although it has some political resonance. The exponents of the cultural paradigm are united in their aversion to a constellation of academic perspectives which highlight the importance of cultural imperialism and/or capitalist globalization and which are usually based on critical political economy. These are defined by cultural globalization theorists as more or less outworn orientations, either completely unsuited for the charting of the complex reality of contemporary globalization or, at best, exaggerated views which may merit some discussion primarily as counter-points. According to the cultural view, the problem with researchers and theorists who uphold such perspectives lies in the fact that they are blind to the instances and possibilities of cultural pluralism

<sup>1</sup> There is a debate over the question of whether it is possible to distinguish between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism in the first place, since "the actual cases of civic and ethnic nationalism are far from being as clear-cut as traditionally assumed, and that prototypical civic nations [e.g., England, France] are not in fact based on purely political principles but are first and foremost cultural and even ethnic communities" (Laegaard 2007, 43).

that globalization has opened up. These charges, which are seen as damaging enough by themselves, have been made more potent by connecting them to the first ideological opponent. Rantanen (2005a, 79–80), for instance, argues that the “media imperialism school” has either ignored “the impact of the national as a homogenizing factor” or “romanticized the national, instead of seeing it as potentially as oppressive as the global”. We should note here, in passing, that for cultural globalization theorists, “the global” is often not an “oppressive” term at all, but more like a synonym for utopian possibilities.

The corollary of the above observations is that cultural globalization theory is not synonymous with the analysis of cultural globalization in general. Starting with articles that were collected for the book *Global Culture* (Featherstone 1990) and a notable conference held in New York in 1989 at which world-systems theorists discussed globalization with researchers coming from cultural studies (see King 1991a), the debate on global cultural homogenization versus heterogenization has continued without interruption. This debate does not, of course, constitute a paradigm by itself since it is founded on competing claims. There are commentators who argue, as Sklair (2002, 42) notes, that “globalization is driven by a homogenizing mass media-based culture, and that this threatens national and/or local cultures and identities”. It is possible to arrive at this kind of conclusion from a scholarly perspective which is distinctively cultural and which is founded on, say, an idea of the moral superiority of pre-modern community life (e.g. Julkunen and Sarmela 1990). It is easy to find such claims outside of academia, in political speeches and programmes which lament the demise of national cultures as they face economic competition and cultural influences from the “outside”, meaning, usually, the United States. Examples of such views are UNESCO’s defence of “cultural exception”, sponsored by France and Canada, and the condemnation of “Western cultural onslaught” (enforced with the help of the internet and other border-crossing electronic media) by Iran’s Islamic leaders (Menashri 2001, 184–190). In contrast to these critiques which seek to preserve a set of local, national or civilizational cultural values, it should be recognized that the critique of cultural homogenization in academia is not necessarily cultural in nature: much or perhaps even most of it is based on Marxist or Neo-Marxist theories, which stress the economy and “represent a high point of homogenization of cultural experience via commodification” (Tomlinson 1999a, 86). Thus, there is no necessary ideological or theoretical link between condemnations of the Americanization of global culture and its commodification, although Nederveen Pieterse (2004, 49–52), a notable cultural globalization theorist, lumps these concepts together as variations of a “McDonaldization” argument.

Disagreeing with the suggestion that the world is undergoing a process of cultural homogenization, cultural globalization theorists have raised many objections against the notion of “cultural imperialism” in particular. One of them is the claim that local (or national or regional) cultures are much more resilient than what has been assumed in the cultural imperialism argument. This claim, however, is not the crux of the matter for exponents of cultural globalization theory today. Instead of writing extensively about “the autonomy of local cultures in the face of advanced global culture” (Sklair 2002, 43), they are more interested in theorizing the many-sided cultural implications of

detrterritorialization that constitutes “the cultural condition of globalization” (Tomlinson 1999a, 106; see also Appadurai 1996, 49). This concept overlaps with the concept of cultural hybridization. For cultural globalization theorists, detrterritorialization and hybridization are decisive theoretical terms that express and explain the ways in which the world-wide cultural context has evolved in recent decades. According to them, cultural globalization is a process that cannot be understood on the basis of outmoded cultural or media imperialism models or cultural theories which insist on speaking about local or national cultures, when in reality such simplified and static spatial categories no longer apply. In place of these views and categories, Appadurai (1996, 33) posits a more fluid conception of global cultural flows and “scapes”.

Proceeding from a similar perspective, Tomlinson (1999a, 70) notes that the analysis of contemporary culture requires as its “theoretical backdrop” the perception that there has occurred “an epochal shift in the social organization of time-space”. Such a pronounced inclusion of a spatio-temporal problematic into the core of cultural theory is a factor which bonds cultural globalization theory with media-technological perspectives on globalization. Nonetheless, a gap between these paradigms remains. For cultural globalization theorists, the cultural effects of electronic media technologies cannot be reduced to media-centric perspectives, according to which these technologies dominate culture through their inherent capacities (such as, in the case of internet, the hypertext form and the principle of virtuality; see Castells 1998, 480–481). In contrast, the present media technologies offer new “resources for experiments with self-making” (Appadurai 1996, 3). In this way, they act as catalysts for changes in global cultural power relations. Even if these developments are necessarily based on technologies, they need to be understood as diverse cultural-symbolic processes rather than as manifestations of some unifying global technological order, as is the case in Lash’s extreme extension of this argument.

Besides theoretical elaborations of detrterritorialization and hybridization and the rejection of discourses of cultural homogenization, cultural globalization theory stands on a third key pillar. It is the vision of cosmopolitanism, often offered towards the end of discussion (Tomlinson 1999a, 181ff; Appadurai 1996, 164ff; see also Rantanen 2005a, 119ff). Cosmopolitanism is the political and normative facet of cultural globalization theory, an anti-essentialist rallying cry for the cultivation of a new post-local or post-national identity that would give rise to a mass movement (instead of remaining a feature of exclusive elites). According to this vision, cosmopolitanism means the development of an ethical consciousness that a) expresses awareness of global issues that affect the whole humanity, and b) which is also reflexive of cultural differences, sceptical of one’s own cultural assumptions (lest they become false universalisms imposed on others) and mindful of the need to engage in dialogue with other cultures (Tomlinson 1999a, 194–195). Taken together, these three motives – detrterritorialization and hybridization, the critique of cultural imperialism and the cosmopolitan ideal – form the essentials of cultural globalization theory.

All of these elements have sparked extensive debates and the ideas which are distinctive for cultural globalization theory have become leading ones in contemporary debates on the globalization of media and culture, spawning an “ever-expanding

literature” (Burke 2005, 187). In order to do justice to the various arguments that the cultural globalization paradigm incorporates, I will next review them more closely. This review will be marked by the central interest of my whole study: the critique of the ways in which media and communications figure in academic globalization literature. The structure of the following review is based on the triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. I will start with the problematic of deterritorialization and hybridization, which emphasize the novelty of cultural globalization. After that, I will examine the idea of cultural imperialism, the antithesis of cultural globalization, and how this is explicitly negated by the authors in question. Third, I will review the notion of cosmopolitanism and the role of the media as its catalyst, a new proposition that is based on the previous positions. Naturally, Appadurai, Tomlinson and other cultural globalization theorists deal with many other issues as well (e.g., the downfall of the nation-state), but I argue that they can be understood through their association with these three main themes.

### 6.3 Cultural Globalization as Deterritorialization and Hybridization

As was noted in above, researchers and theorists who comment on cultural globalization are dealing with the question of cultural difference: is globalization a process that is leading towards cultural uniformity, or does it signal the strengthening of cultural diversity? Stated in this deceptively simplified way, the question anticipates a straightforward answer that is rarely given in text-books and studies of globalization, at least in those ones which are based on extensive reading. A more prominent rhetorical strategy is the claim that we can find examples of both tendencies at the same time, in a way which is thoroughly dialectical. Yet what I argue here is that in general, cultural researchers of globalization are committed to their own emphases and tend to see it as a process of cultural diversification. Speaking of his role as an anthropologist, Appadurai (1996, 11) remarks that his “archive of lived actualities” predisposes him “strongly toward the idea that globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization” and that this is “the very least” he “would want the reader to take away from [his] book”. Tomlinson (2003, 271) is similarly confident that “globalization actually proliferates rather than destroys identities”. All in all, dismissive references to a supposedly “crude homogenization thesis” (ibid., 273) are more frequent in cultural theories of cultural globalization than references to a “crude heterogenization thesis” (for an example of what this concept might refer to, see Cowen 2002).

If the prevalent idea in such thinking is that we are not witnessing cultural homogenization, what kind of cultural diversity is now emerging? The answer depends on whom one asks, since different cultural researchers and theorists emphasize different outcomes, on the basis of their variable understandings of what culture is. Here two positions can be distinguished from each other: a traditional culturalist perspective and cultural globalization theory proper. I have already discussed the first category at length in a section that examined cultural studies and its relationship with international communication research. As was noted, in the traditional culturalist perspective, emphasis is placed on territorial cultures and identities, on their resilience

and on cultural authenticity and autonomy. In terms of how media is treated in this type of cultural globalization research, we need to remember the prominence given to such concepts as cultural proximity and the localization, nationalization, regionalization or “glocalization” of the media, including industrial structures, symbolic content and consumption patterns. The overriding conclusion of such studies is that cultural belief systems, values, identities and preferences are well-entrenched; they resist assimilation and cultural domination, especially if we mean by this the relationships between the North and the South. According to this view, globalization, far from destroying cultural differences, actually strengthens the position of discrete cultures, understood either as geographically bound communities or as more mental constructions, such as “geolinguistic regions” (Sinclair 2000) of the global media sphere. In both cases, the dominant principle is the claim that the human world is a mosaic constituted by many cultural particulars, separated by cultural boundaries that are founded on difference.

The persistence of these boundaries is a hypothesis that cannot be discarded offhand in light of the empirical evidence that can be gathered to support it. Cultural boundaries are associated with collective experiences, shared political histories, common language or common religion; in other words, they are not just a random collection of free-floating fictions. This is partly confirmed also by cultural globalization theorists who, in the main, profess a very different view of worldwide cultural developments. Thus, Appadurai (1996, 17) remarks that also in times of contemporary globalization, “there is still ample room for the deep study of specific geographies, histories, and languages” and that the history of global circulation of cultural forms “is about their ongoing domestication into local practice”. In fact, one of Appadurai’s most imaginative discussions in *Modernity at Large* is his analysis of the “Indianization” of cricket, a “hard” cultural form which does not lend itself to easy transformation – but which nevertheless “has become profoundly indigenized and decolonized”, notably because of electronic media which has helped “to unyoke cricket from its Englishness” (ibid., 90–91). Tomlinson (1999a, 149) complements this from a more existential viewpoint when he argues that “we are all, as human beings, *embodied and physically located*”; due to this material fact, “the ties of culture to location can never be completely severed”.

It is of importance, however, that this argument comes as a caveat after a lengthy discussion of forces that are leading to the severance of precisely such ties. Tomlinson (1999a, 148) sees a “drive toward reterritorialization”, as people on the move are seeking new cultural “homes”; but this development can only be understood by juxtaposing it with its “dialectical opponent”, namely deterritorialization. This concept is defined by Garcia Canclini (1995, 229) as “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories”. This does not imply the destruction of localities once and for all, but it certainly does mean that their status has altered in ways which necessitate an analytical reassessment. For Appadurai (1996, 178), locality today is produced in a “dramatically delocalized world”, in a world where local cultures are necessarily subjected to global influences; therefore, “the task of producing locality [...] is increasingly a struggle” (ibid., 189). Tomlinson (1999a, 113) makes a similar point by noting that even if people are always physically located, it becomes hard to maintain a sense of local or national cultural identity “as our daily lives become more and more

interwoven with, and penetrated by, influences and experiences that have their origins far away”.

Thus it would seem that cultural boundaries are increasingly permeable. Because of this, foundations for stable cultural identities have become shakier and the traditional conception of culture that views it through the categories of locality and authenticity has also been undermined. Here a specification of differences between the traditional culturalist view on globalization and cultural globalization theory is in place. These positions are not totally at odds, since they both may proceed on a basis of a similar anthropological understanding of culture as “behavior and beliefs that are learned and shared” (Nederveen Pieterse 2004, 46). But as Nederveen Pieterse notes, in order to work out a more specific argument, this definition does not have to assume that such social sharing is limited by geography. Cultural contexts for interaction change all the time; there are “therefore [...] no territorial limitations to culture” (ibid.), especially when we speak of contemporary global conditions. “Human experience”, the same author maintains conclusively, “is fluid and open-ended”; accordingly, “critical anthropology opts for deterritorialized notions of culture such as flows and ‘traveling culture’” instead of “the reification of the local” (ibid., 47).<sup>2</sup> The claims expressed herein sum up what can be named as the currently hegemonic position in the study of cultural globalization, a position occupied also by Appadurai and Tomlinson.

When the significance of territorial location for culture is called into question in such candid terms, another set of concepts and theories are bound to emerge. One of the “brute facts” for Appadurai (1996, 48) is that group identities “around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous”. This is a “central challenge for current anthropology”. It poses “an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization” (ibid., 49). In Appadurai’s work, deterritorialization refers to flows that transcend “specific territorial boundaries and identities” (ibid.). There are now “disjunctures” that occur between economy, culture and politics. Appadurai famously equates them with his model of “five dimensions of global cultural flows”.

According to Appadurai, these dimensions involve both human and non-human actors. They are fluid in their form, meaning that they do not constitute objective relations, but rather, “scapes” which are “inflected by “the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness” of these different actors. Thus we have a) “ethnoscapes”, people on the move such as tourists, guest workers and exiles; b) “technoscapes”, the global distribution of technologies, both industrial and informational technologies, which move across regions and “previously impervious boundaries” so that the global organization of production becomes more dispersed; c) “financescapes”, that is, the speedy and extensive flow of capital in global financial networks; d) “mediascapes”, the globally dispersed production and flow of mediated images; and e) “ideoscapes”, images also, but in the sense of being “directly political [...] the ideology of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (Appadurai 1996, 35–36).

2 For a fuller clarification of the referent of James Clifford’s notion of “traveling culture”, see page 218.



Appadurai (in Rantanen 2006, 14) points out in retrospective that his model of global disjunctures was an attempt “to identify some basic links between the conditions of material life and the conditions of art and imagination”. All flows that he discusses have been occurring during earlier periods of human history, but now the extensity, intensity and velocity of each of these flows is so great that the disjunctural relationships that they form “have become central to the politics of global culture” (Appadurai 1996, 37). What this indicates is that “the conditions of material life and the conditions of art and imagination” today are very different from previous times. Modernity is not what it used to be. It is now “modernity at large”, a different modernity which is “more mobile” and more unpredictable than ever before (Appadurai, in Rantanen 2006, 11).

Such is the outline of Appadurai’s general theory of globalization. Viewed from this perspective, there is nothing in it that contradicts the basic constituents of academic globalization theory as a whole, with its preoccupation with heightened interconnectedness and all things mobile. The idea that modernity is now more unpredictable than before is also a familiar one – it characterizes the recent work of Ulrich Beck and Scott Lash in particular – together with the claim that the relationships between the five types of flows are contingent, following “nonisomorphic paths” (Appadurai 1996, 37). However, there is one element in his general outline of globalization that is distinctive: it is the fact that he insists that all of his “scapes” are different aspects of global *cultural* flows, including people, machinery, money, images and ideas. Thus the central lesson that Appadurai derives from his analysis of globalization is a cultural one. It is the idea, first, that the “disjunctures” in question are affected by specific cultural contexts (ibid.). Second, and far more importantly, the global human condition is now such that as people and ideas are continuously flowing and coming into contact with each other around the globe, the net result is a tremendous multiplication of “imagined worlds” (ibid., 33).

This has two further implications, both of them addressed by Appadurai as crises in the reproduction of culture. The first is that cultural identities have become more unstable and more “improvised” in conditions of globalization. In traditional anthropological terms, the process of enculturation has become more problematic today, as families are separated by diasporas. Thus the “transmission of culture” from one generation to another “can no longer be assumed” (Appadurai 1996, 43). The second is that nation-states have faced profound difficulties in their attempts to uphold “official” identities, which are functional for the maintenance of its dominant institutions. The reproduction of such identities is in crisis, which accounts for state-directed attempts to re-establish and monopolize ideas of true “nationhood” (as well as for the formation of fundamentalist political attachments that are also based on the internalization of essentialist world-views, often based on ethnicity or religion). One of the issues, however, over which Appadurai (ibid., 19) has “come to be convinced” is that nation-states are on their “last legs”, unable to function as “long-term arbiters of the relationship between globality and modernity”. The crisis of reproduction of national identities clears the way for the production of “a post-national imaginary” (ibid., 21–22).



For these reasons, the discontent that Castells, for example, has voiced regarding the demise of real-life communal bonds is not expressed by Appadurai. Nor is it expressed by Tomlinson, who finds a critical limitation in Castells's analysis of cultural dimensions of globalization. Tomlinson argues that Castells proceeds from the idea that the production of identities is a primordial force, showing itself in "the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism" (Castells 2004a, 2). By establishing such an opposition, Tomlinson (2003, 271) observes, Castells "fails to see the rather compelling *inner* logic between the globalization process and the institutionalized construction of identities". What this amounts to is the argument that the construction of cultural identity might really be a modern invention, because modernity "institutionalizes and regulates cultural practices, including those by which we imagine attachments and belonging to a place or a community" (ibid., 272). Furthermore, this institutionalization and regulation happens across time and space, so that social and cultural practices are "lifted out" (Giddens) of local particularities. This modern project has, if anything, intensified in recent decades as our cultural experiences have become determined by deterritorialization on a global level (ibid., 272–273). What follows from this is that globalization does not so much challenge cultural identities as it makes possible new imaginings based on multiple ways of articulating gender, sexuality, locality, religion, race and ethnicity. Again, the logical corollary is that national identities are threatened by the general proliferation of deterritorialized identity positions.

Deterritorialization is closely linked to another keyword in discussions of cultural globalization, namely, hybridization. Although these two concepts are in many ways parallel, we can still make a slight distinction between them: the former identifies a general process whereby ties between culture and place have become dissolved, whereas the latter refers to the resulting "hybrid" cultural forms and identities. The basic idea of hybridization or hybridity is simple enough: it points to the fusion or mixing of various cultures that springs up from their constant and recently heightened interaction. Hybridization has taken a central place in cultural globalization theory. This notion exudes, more so than any other comparable concept, the kind of poststructuralist celebration of cultural difference which looms large in the paradigm.

One of the most passionate supporters of hybridization as an analytic concept is the Dutch sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995; 2004). The discussion of his position is useful for the present Chapter. He sees the phenomenon as the single most characteristic feature of cultural transformation in contemporary times, as well as the overriding synonym for globalization. It signals the overall global shift from what he calls culture 1 (cultures as territorial, community-based and "inward-looking") to culture 2 (translocal cultures, network-based and "outward-looking"), in which "it's the mixing of cultures and not their separateness that is emphasized" (Nederveen Pieterse 1995, 62). Furthermore, he notes (ibid., 56–57) that hybrid cultures can be of an "assimilationist" nature, in which case they mimic hegemonic cultures. Equally and more prominently, we can today witness the rise of "a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current [and] subverts the centre". This is to be expected especially in contexts in which people live "between cultures" (Bhabha 1994), such as border towns and cities

characterized by migration (like Tijuana in Mexico; see Garcia Canclini 1995) or in many diasporic communities around the world. However, hybridization is viewed by cultural globalization theorists as a development that exceeds any particular setting. Media researchers John Sinclair and Stuart Cunningham (2000, 22) see “the diasporic experience” as archetypal today, since it highlights the mobility and fluidity of cultural meanings and identities everywhere. According to them, the trope of “traveling cultures”, suggested by social historian James Clifford, is a particularly succinct encapsulation of contemporary global cultural dynamics:

“the most appropriate revision of all of the concept of culture comes from James Clifford (1992), who proposes that ‘to focus on hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones,’ in a world of people in flux, ‘we rethink culture and its science, anthropology, in terms of travel’ (p. 101). Thus, instead of the traditional trope of culture being an organic outgrowth of a particular place, the motif of travel can incorporate all those forms of movement experienced by people today, which take them or keep them away from their real or putative place of origin. Even if they are not all travelling in the same class, Clifford’s shifting of the concept of culture away from *roots* and toward *routes* instead (p. 108) endows it with a more flexible way to deal with the many different kinds of ‘floating lives’ that characterize our time.” (Ibid., 18)

Appadurai subscribes to similar idea and analysis of culture. Appadurai (1996, 27–28) notes that in pre-modern eras wars, commerce and expanding religions kept “cultural traffic” in motion, in the guise of “travellers, merchants, pilgrims and conquerors”. This, however, does not negate the proposition that “today’s world involves interactions of a new order and intensity”. Some stable forms of cultural attachment remain, but even these have been “shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move” (ibid., 33–34). This has resulted in ever more complex ethnoscares “in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of references”, such as ethnic traditions and “other identity markers”, are “regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication” (ibid., 44).

Such metaphors link Appadurai’s work to that of Clifford’s very directly. Tomlinson, also, finds much in common with Clifford, but he also makes the point that one should not interpret the notion of “traveling cultures” too literally. He warns against “insisting on the essence of culture as restless nomadic movement”, since “roots and routes” are “always co-existent”. Furthermore, there are people who stay put (because they have to or they want to), even if “globalization promotes much more physical mobility than ever before” (Tomlinson 1999a, 29).

For Tomlinson, as noted, deterritorialization is the befitting term for the current global cultural condition: it is a process out of which rises the “complex connectivity” of globalization, that is, “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of

interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life” (1999a, 2). These interconnections and interdependencies can be of many different kinds, ranging from travelling abroad or eating in ethnic restaurants to more imagined encounters with far-away locations – or even more abstractly, to the integrated nature of global economic relations that produce effects even in those places which are less densely networked (ibid., 106–137, *passim*). All of these connections are, for Tomlinson, examples of inherently modern “disembedding mechanisms” (Giddens), which cause social and cultural relations to stretch out from their local insularity (ibid., 55–66). Cultural hybridization is for Tomlinson certainly “a substantive aspect” of such deterritorializations (ibid., 147), but it is not the whole logic of cultural globalization. There are also other types of transformation of localities that are occurring. An example that Tomlinson (2003, 276) mentions are “upwardly mobile Beijingers”, who display distinctive “Chineseness” in their clothing styles, in ways which lead to the conclusion that “subjects can now experience and express, without contradiction, both attachments to the nation, multi-ethnic alliances *and* cosmopolitan sensibilities” (ibid.). According to Tomlinson, theories of hybridization do not lend themselves easily to the analysis of how such “new and complex versions of national identity” are being promoted.

This particular critique of hybridity theory, however, is somewhat awkward. One of the ideas that figures in García Canclini’s (1995) classic work on hybridity – which Tomlinson cites on numerous occasions – is the notion of “multitemporal heterogeneity”. This concept casts light to current cultural dynamics in Latin America, where indigenous traditions and colonial experiences intermingle with current political and economic developments. García-Canclini associates the hybrid cultural forms that typify this multi-temporality especially with members of the urban middle-class, who have in their homes traditional handicrafts and colonial furniture side by side with cable television and other objects of affluence. Such manifestations of upward mobility “implies not so much associating oneself with a repertory of exclusively modern objects and messages, but rather knowing how to incorporate the art and literature of the vanguard, as well as technological advances, into traditional matrices of social privilege and symbolic distinction” (ibid., 46–47). In García-Canclini’s view, there are many “strategies for entering and leaving modernity”. The eclectic mixing of tradition and modernity is a crucial source for cultural hybridization among urban Latin Americans. From this perspective, Tomlinson’s young affluent Beijingers with their neo-traditional *qipao* dresses are not the exception, but rather, the norm in how cultural dynamics of globalization are being played out in regions that are attempting to enter the centre of world economy.

There are more far-reaching criticisms of hybridization theory, discussed also by Tomlinson in detail. In fact, the critique of both keywords of cultural globalization theory – hybridization and deterritorialization – is similar in substance. It boils down to a number of charges. The first is that the concepts are theoretically uninformative or even incoherent. Here, Tomlinson speaks of “the myth of pre-modern localism” which means that there has never existed a culture completely devoid of contact with the larger world; all cultures have been to some extent deterritorialized “traveling cultures”. As for hybridization, there is “the myth of unadulterated culture” (Morris 2002), which should

be counterpoised with the claim that cultural mixing and interchange are more like the historical standard, than an exception emerging from recent technological or economic developments. Edward Said (1994, xxix), points out that “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic”. An unfortunate consequence of this, as Tomlinson (1999a, 144) observes, is that it is hard to avoid making a tautological argument if one wants to counter the myth by claiming that globalization is about the recent acceleration of hybridization: this would be tantamount to a claim that what we are facing now is “the hybridization of hybrid cultures” (Nederveen Pieterse 1995, 64).

The second critique centres around the universality – or, rather, the lack of it – of deterritorialization and hybridization as cultural experiences (Tomlinson 1999a, 130–137). This brings attention to the claim that the world is still constituted by hierarchical relations between regions. As Doreen Massey (1994) has argued, there is a “power geometry” to globalization which makes it an uneven process. A map of globalization would “not show a totally interconnected system”, since “there would be both long-standing absences and the systematic production of new disconnections” (Massey 2005, 100). The issue of social class must be added to the asymmetries of global power geometry. There are no good empirical grounds on the basis of which one could equate the experiences of Chinese businessmen travelling first class to a meeting in India, low-wage workers living in trailer park in Miami or drug addicts sleeping in their own excrement in the streets of São Paulo and call them all examples of “deterritorialization”. On the same count, production of hybrid cultural expressions or enjoyment of their consumption is an option mostly for those with enough cultural and economic resources, the distribution of which reflects unequal material power relations and hegemonic structures.

This charge mutates into a third one: the claim that hybridity theory is carried on by cosmopolitan elites and migrant intellectuals, whose fanciful jargon is out of touch with the realities of world’s unprivileged majorities. This sort of critique is voiced by such authors as Ahmad (1992), Dirlik (1994) and Friedman (2000). These authors are allegedly responsible for so-called “the anti-hybridity backlash” against which pro-hybridity theorists (Nederveen Pieterse 2001; Papastergiadis 2005) have taken up arms.

Jonathan Friedman, an American anthropologist residing in Sweden, is the main culprit in this context. Friedman’s (2000) view – and it is a blunt one to be sure – is that class position explains cultural dispositions. Globalization in the centre of the world system takes place now in tandem with the intensification of class polarization. This manifests itself in “a combination of increasing cosmopolitanism among rising elites and increasing localism, nationalism and xenophobia among declining and increasingly marginalized classes” (ibid., 652). Those belonging to the former group spread around them ideologies of globalization, including the ideology of cultural hybridization, which satisfies happy “translocal border-crossers”, while the others are plagued by “concerns far removed from questions of roots and routes, except, perhaps of how to get from the sweatshop to the hood or the barrio, and how to get the rest of the family over the border [...] in a world of increasing hostility” (ibid., 653). This sombre

picture casts a shadow over hybridity theory. What Friedman argues is that stripped of its emancipatory pretensions and exaltations of cultural difference, hybridity theory is revealed to be a justification of class-based privilege via a smug condemnation of those who harbour, because of their downtrodden status, localist or nationalist sentiments that are out of keeping with the cosmopolitan age.

A fourth variant in the critique of hybridity is commonly associated with the third type (see Tomlinson 1999a, 145–146; Zuberi 2005, 109; Papastergiadis 2005, 50). It proceeds similarly from the observation that the discourse of hybridization mimics economic developments under neoliberal capitalism, not so much as a class ideology, but more as the embodiment of global commodity fetishism. Hutnyk (2000, 31) argues that “hybridity talk” thrives on displaying concepts such as hybridity, diaspora and postcoloniality, which can be “marketed with a brand recognition that is an advertiser’s dream”. Whatever politics may flow from this discourse is severely undercut by the suggestion that the capitalist market system is more than willing to cater for cultural difference (and to incorporate it), instead of selling homogeneity with a stubborn determination. Hybridization may, then, be another word for the commodification of culture in its present forms, or at least a key word by means of which analytical sights are turned away from that tendency. It should be noted here that the neoliberal principle of the “free market” is dependent on the commodification of cultural difference, both in the sense that it generates profits, and in the sense that it makes anti-hegemonic projects that much more difficult to launch: for who in their right mind would oppose a system that supports ceaseless cultural variation?

All of these charges have been repudiated in the cultural globalization theory paradigm, but I find the last critique especially interesting, as cultural globalization theorists typically show keen disinterest in the analysis of cultural domination from the viewpoint of commodity fetishism and commodity aesthetics. Because of this, I will concentrate on that form of critique in the concluding section of this Chapter. Tomlinson is more ready to make certain concessions to the critics of hybridization than Nederveen Pieterse, who has zero tolerance for an “anti-hybridity backlash” of any kind. Yet both of them are in agreement over the need to preserve deterritorialization or hybridization as the corner-stones of cultural globalization theory – or of any critical theory of society and culture, for that matter.

Tomlinson’s (1999a) countermove is instructive in light of the paradigm he represents. As for the first critique, he does not deny the soundness of charges against the assumed purity of local cultures, since all are actually hybrid and deterritorialized by their nature (*ibid.*, 129). This is, indeed, a logical stance for cultural globalization theorists, as they are against boundary-thinking and cultural essentialism in general. However, to leave the issue at that is not an option, because that would deny the usefulness of deterritorialization or hybridization as analytical concepts. Therefore, one “must not go to the other extreme” and discount “the significance of locality within pre-modern societies” as well as the fact that there is “evidence of the accelerating pace of globalization transforming our own modern cultural localisms” (*ibid.*, 130). It can be also claimed that the resulting mixture of cultural influences is altogether much more multilateral today than what it was in pre-modern encounters between a limited

number of cultures that co-existed in relatively close proximity. Nederveen Pieterse (2001, 222) is of the same opinion, but he adds that while hybridization as such is “as old as history”, the “*thematization* of mixing as a discourse and perspective is fairly new”, which has political implications. In other words, instead of being “in itself”, cultural hybridity is now “for itself”, elevated to the status of a major agent of history.

On the second charge, Tomlinson replies that the unevenness of globalization (which is undeniable) does not mean that people would be excluded or exempted from the process, because this unevenness can be interpreted as referring to “the differential access to control over events *within* the process” (Tomlinson 1999a, 132). Globalization is disadvantageous for many people who are living in material and informational poverty. However, this does not “imply exclusion from the underlying cultural transformations which lift lived experience out of its rootedness in localities” (ibid., 134). Thus, there is “a certain basic level of communality” (ibid.) in the experience of (cultural) globalization across class-boundaries. Furthermore, the contemporary Third World is not as rural and pre-modern as some would have it. It is undergoing “rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization, and the availability and use of communications technologies found there” (ibid., 136). Because of this growth of connectivity, it is possible to argue that the processes of deterritorialization and hybridization are actually felt more sharply in the “margins” than in the “centre”. In any case, the key claim of cultural globalization theory is that the world can no longer be represented through core-periphery models (Appadurai 1996, 32; Tomlinson 1999a, 138). The disjunctive, post-colonial movements of people from impoverished parts of the world to formerly imperialist nations affect the production of cultural identities and identifications in the latter. In this sense the “Other” has installed itself within the very heart of the western metropolis [...] [t]hrough a kind of reverse invasion, the periphery has now infiltrated the colonial core” (Robins 1991, 32; cited by Tomlinson 1999a, 147).

Tomlinson is not arguing that these reverse flows are erasing the basic unevenness of material conditions under which cultural hybridization takes place. However, there is also a break between the economic and the cultural in his explanation: the “power of hegemonic forces is felt *within* hybridity which is none the less experienced as having its own independent cultural power” (Tomlinson 1999a, 146–147). Observations like these suggest a close relation between hybridity and increasing agency, especially among the downtrodden. According to cultural globalization theorists, it is most patently not the case that hybridity is an invention concocted by cosmopolitan elites, or that it is only open to them, whereas “marginalized classes” are doomed to “increasing localism, nationalism and xenophobia”, as Friedman claims. Tomlinson (ibid., 133–134) writes, for example, to the effect that inner-city poor are often closer to cultural transformations in their midst than the affluent who are retreating into gated communities or “rural backwaters”.

Similarly, Nederveen Pieterse (2001, 229) argues that rather than being victimized by the forces of globalization, the powerless strike back on the basis of their cultural creativity, such as when “lower-class youngsters, second-generation immigrants [...] develop new, mixed lifestyles” in major Western European cities. Here, however, we are only approaching the main issue, which is, according to Nederveen Pieterse, the

proposition that “nowadays we are”, so to speak, “*all* Moroccan girls doing Thai boxing in Amsterdam” (ibid., 237). That is to say that everyday life in every part of the world (with the possible exception of Burma, North Korea and other insular states) and at every level of the social class hierarchy is characterized by imaginative crossovers. Cultural hybridization is not a cosmopolitan elite experience; it has already become “an *ordinary* experience” (ibid.; see also Tomlinson 1999a, 147). And if this is not enough, the charge of elitism made by the anti-hybridity faction can be turned back at them on the grounds that it is pure *ad hominem*. Responding to Friedman’s (1999, 236–237) anti-cosmopolitan claims with a tit-for-tat argument, Nederveen Pieterse (2001, 228) retorts that “aversion to cosmopolitanism and the decadence of city life was part of Hitler’s outlook and the Nazi ideology of blood and soil”.

Combined with the force of all the previous objections, the last comment is meant to seal the fate of anti-hybridity arguments for good. However, the debate continues. In the above, I have delineated the key features of how cultural globalization theorists, including Appadurai and Tomlinson, approach the cultural logic of globalization. As a temporary conclusion, I propose that their work is shot through with a distinctive ethos which is fully commensurable with the theoretical main line of contemporary cultural studies that I identified in Chapter 3, namely, the emergence of poststructuralism as its “leading critical standpoint” (Mosco 1996, 209).<sup>3</sup> For example, Appadurai (1996, 29) notes in reference to Deleuze and Guattari that “the world in which we live now seems rhizomic” or “even schizophrenic”, a choice of words that suggests a strong linkage between the analysis of global cultural flows and a poststructuralist theoretical orientation (see also Nederveen Pieterse 2004, 52). More generally, both Appadurai and Tomlinson view cultural identities and cultural forms as categories that are constantly being produced anew through the mobilization of difference. While there have been many “returns” to “rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity” (Said 1994, xiv), cultural globalization theorists agree that it has become increasingly difficult to uphold primordialist ideas of ethnic identity (Tomlinson 1999a, 147; Appadurai 1996, 188–189). Instead of being anchored in a naturalized essence, cultural identities are anti-essentialist, in the unending process of becoming. Hybridization or hybridity are theoretical concepts that are used to account for the emergence of these new culturally constructed forms of identity. The empirical justification for their usefulness is founded on the observation that global cultural flows have become intensely and extensively deterritorialized. Thus it does not matter too much which one of these two processes – hybridization or deterritorialization – are

3 Bhabha (1994), a celebrated author of post-colonialism who has also deeply influenced cultural globalization researchers, writes of hybridity strategies as counter-hegemonic constructions of meaning and identity, with the help of which the marginalized can strike back at colonisers. They emanate from liminal “third spaces”, i.e., discursive sites that are opened up by the ambivalent interplay between the oppressor and the oppressed and which “ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized anew” (ibid., 37). Once again, the radical indeterminacy of meaning is appreciated here as supremely subversive. This view is highly indebted to a poststructuralist understanding of identity and power that has, as was discussed earlier, influenced cultural studies and also the analysis of media and cultural globalization. In this sense, globalization does not represent a wholly new theoretical opening but more like a new problematic within which previously established theoretical concerns may today be continued.



defined as the “true” cultural logic of globalization. Both terms necessitate each other in the structure of cultural globalization theory argumentation.

I will reserve my own judgements of such a line of reasoning for later stages of this Chapter. For now, I will press ahead with my review by linking media to cultural globalization theory. What kind of media theory and what kind of specific arguments concerning the media and communications are the representatives of the paradigm putting forward?

## 6.4 The Media and the Deterritorialization of Imagination

Both Tomlinson and Appadurai aim to avoid an explicitly media-centric viewpoint. In his study of theories of cultural imperialism, Tomlinson (1991, 63) warns against seeing “the media as determining rather than as mediating cultural experience”, for even in modern societies in which the media dominates culture on the representational level, people have lived experiences – such as talking with friends and families or activities related to “material-existential experiences of routine life” – which do not necessarily imply any strong media presence (ibid., 61). Writing about deterritorialization, Tomlinson (1999a, 120) notes that this process can be experienced in other ways than through encounters with mediated forms of culture – such as through eating “exotic” food that is now available in local supermarkets and restaurants all over the world (ibid., 120–128). Appadurai (1996, 4), for his part, views the media and migration as interconnected forces which together define “the core of the link between globalization and the modern”.

Nonetheless, these comments – which refer to a empirical fact that the ties between culture and place have loosened not only because of the flows of images but also because of the flow of tangible objects and the experiencing subjects themselves – need to be placed in the context of the basic principles that determine Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s work on cultural globalization. For Appadurai (1996, 53), it is “the role of the imagination in social life”, the idea that global events are guided by ideologies, fantasies and imaginaries that take hold of the consciousness of social groups and propel them to action (ibid., 7, 31, 145). For Tomlinson (1999a, 20), it is the “complex connectivity” of globalization, especially the question of how the rapidly developing network of interconnections alters the construction of identities, the experience of place and “the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life”. When we look at their argumentation in connection to these main themes, it becomes evident how central the media is for their frameworks. Consider, for example, the following passage in which Appadurai (1996, 55) discusses media and imagination:

“The link between the imagination and social life [...] is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one. Thus, those who represent real or ordinary lives must resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life. Rather, ethnography must redefine itself as



that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories. This is thickness with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available.”

These claims can be related directly to the postmodern project of “critical anthropology”, dating back to 1980s, with its concern with the “crisis of representation” and the old-fashionness of traditional anthropology (Marcus and Fisher 1986). One important aspect of this development was an about-face in the evaluation of how central the media is for anthropological research. Instead of remaining “a taboo topic [...] too redolent of Western modernity”, the media became a key element of “critical anthropological project that refuses reified boundaries of place and culture” (Ginsburg et al. 2002, 1, 3). For critical anthropologists, the media is in effect the *sine qua non* for a new cultural theory that “takes us beyond culture as a spatially localized phenomenon” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 48). The same is true with Appadurai. For him, the development of electronic media is “the basis of the plurality of imagined worlds” and the underlying reason why imagination has “entered the logic of ordinary life” (Appadurai 1996, 5). Discussing the joint effect of media and migration on new vistas of social and cultural imagination, he notes that

“the images, scripts, models, and narratives that come through mass mediation (in its realistic and fictional modes) make the difference between migration today and in the past. Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space.” (Ibid., 6)

With these developments, the traditional anthropological object of local groups with their customs and world-views has vanished. Its place has been taken by “communities of sentiment”, no longer organized by “print capitalism” on a national level but by “electronic capitalism” on a transnational level. Media is the resource that holds such transnational or translocal communities together. Appadurai defines these new communal forms as “mass-mediated sodalities” or “diasporic public spheres”, which “have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics can crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergences in translocal social action” (1996, 8). At one point, Appadurai remarks that “the importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels” (ibid.,

53). What this somewhat hyperinflated prose means, supposedly, is that the media are powerful not only as providers of aesthetic or cognitive content; they are organic parts of the everyday life with the help of which people orientate themselves in a delocalizing world populated by friends and strangers.

Whatever the specifics, the main point for Appadurai (1996, 10) is that the media are catalysts of “the work of the imagination” that transform “everyday subjectivities”. Appadurai explains the potent role that the media play in societies in the following terms:

“Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places. In general, imagination and fantasy were antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by the mass media in all their forms.” (Ibid., 53–54)

This is the basis for “the new power of the imagination” (1996, 54). According to Appadurai, the deterritorialized symbolic constructions created by and circulated in the electronic media – “image-centered” and “narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” (ibid., 35) – have many implications. For one thing, they are one of the main reasons why cultural reproduction has become “a daily hazard”, because the media “afford powerful resources for counternodes of identity that youth can project against parental wishes or desires” (ibid., 45). Such transformations are not only cultural. In Appadurai’s view, the fantasies and “dreams of wealth, respectability, and autonomy” (ibid., 63) that the media offer coalesce into multiple political aspirations that nation-states are incapable of controlling on the ideological level. Thus the project of modernization is no longer “the monopoly of autonomous nation-states” (ibid., 10).

Appadurai (1996, 140) continues his political analysis by arguing strongly against “primordialist” perspectives on what drives political action – assumptions according to which collective identities are “based on shared claims to blood, soil, or language”. Instead, he emphasizes “the autonomy of ideology in political life” (ibid., 145). Far from being a mechanical effect of some “primordial homunculus”, ethnic violence results from a collision of two forces: nation-states which foster cultural fundamentalisms for their own ends, especially in order to construct “homogenous subjects of the state”, and transnational culturalist movements which “operate beyond the confines of a single nation-state” and which are intimately connected to “diasporic public spheres” (ibid., 146–147).

It seems that, for Appadurai, ethnic violence is ultimately caused by deterritorialization and especially by its main agent, the electronic media. He notes that there is already an in-built contradiction in the nation-state between the ideology

of the ethnically homogenous nation and the reality that all nation-states are composed of many identities. Yet because of the flows of people and electronic media, this contradiction has been exacerbated “on a new scale and at larger levels” in times of accelerated globalization. What follows from this is a new turbulent cultural-ideological condition, whereby different “culturalisms compete for a piece of the nation”. They thus “inevitably enter into the space of potential violence” (Appadurai 1996, 156). Appadurai singles the media out in his explanation when he claims that the most violent eruptions of ethnic strife are caused by atrocity stories disseminated in the media, which depict the former neighbour (of different ethnic background) as the perpetrator. These inflammatory representations produce “a profound sense” of betrayal and treachery which enters “the local imagination” and turns “ordinary people into killers, torturers and rapists” (ibid., 154–155). There is nothing atavistic in this dynamic, Appadurai points out, for it can only be understood via references to “the large-scale identities created, transformed, and reified by modern state apparatuses (often in a transnational and diasporic field) and circulated through the media” (ibid., 155).

Let us summarize Appadurai’s perspective. He sees that cultural identities are founded on cultural constructions, “experiments with self-making”, for which the media offers plenty of symbolic material (Appadurai 1996, 3–4). Identities have become increasingly deterritorialized and hybridized, no more embedded in long-standing and territorially bounded structures of feeling. As imagination has been “unyoked” from place (ibid., 58), it becomes attached to new aspirations, new cultural expressions and new politics; as such, it also generates “new needs for social discipline and surveillance on the parts of the elites” (ibid., 54) who wish things were more simple on the cultural front. All things considered, mediated imaginaries are sources for explosive cultural mixtures – for agency, action, reaction and struggle.

Much of what characterizes Tomlinson’s view of the media and communications is similar to Appadurai’s approach. He too notes that the key to understanding global cultural transformation is not the examination of physical mobility or migration, but the analysis “mediated forms” of deterritorialization (Tomlinson 1999a, 29–30, 115). Thus,

“for the majority, the cultural experience of globalization is not a matter of massively increased physical mobility, of notching up thousands of air miles, of ‘globetrotting’ and having direct experience of distant countries and exotic cultures. Though increased physical mobility is an important cultural aspect of global modernity as a whole [...], it is fair to say that for most people most of the time the impact of globalization is felt not in travel but in staying at home. One rather direct way of posing the issue then is as the distinction between literally travelling to distant places and ‘travelling’ to them by talking on the telephone, typing at the computer keyboard or watching the television set.” (Ibid., 150)

It needs to be noted here that Tomlinson's view of media and communications is informed by medium theory (though by no means unequivocally). Thus, he (1999a, 116) writes that the cultural impact of media and communications is not limited to the messages and representations that they carry, as we also need to note "their capacity to structure our experience and use of time and space". Indeed, a whole chapter of *Globalization and Culture* is dedicated to a technological analysis of mediated experiences (ibid., 150–180). In this, Tomlinson takes his cue from Meyrowitz's (1985) influential study of media as cultural environments (see section 3.5 above). Tomlinson agrees with Meyrowitz that media and communications technologies are important socially and culturally in that they bridge the gap between geographically separated places and social hierarchies by making other places and other people "accessible" for users of media. He follows Meyrowitz also by emphasizing that the impact of media is not unitary, since each individual medium, such as telephones, television and networked computers, envelop their users in distinctive phenomenal worlds (Tomlinson 1999a, 155–156). For example, the "telephone's ring 'intrudes' into the local situation in a different way from the television's stream of images or the message on the computer telling you that you have a new e-mail" (ibid., 158). Tomlinson continues this line of analysis by looking at "telemediated intimacy", that is, the transformation of intimate familial and sexual relationships via the use of different media technologies (ibid., 160ff). In this context, he even makes some tentative comments about "the blurring of human-machine divide" (ibid., 166) and the dawn of a post-human culture (a more thorough analysis of which we encountered in relation to Lash's work in Chapter 5).<sup>4</sup> Tomlinson's medium-theoretical discussion concludes with speculations concerning the global moral implications of telemediacy, or the possibility that the media may provide a "compelling sense of involvement with distant lives and events" (ibid., 172).

Tomlinson's (1999a, 180) main idea is to pursue the ways in which media and communications "lift us out" of "discrete localities" and "open up our lifeworld to a larger world". Because of these interests and the above-mentioned perspectives that he uses, it could be argued that Tomlinson is actually conducting a media-technological

4 Tomlinson's *Globalization and Culture* offers a fairly restrained analysis of "new media", compared to Poster's (1995) or Lash's (2002) highly technological, postmodernist media theory. Tomlinson criticises Poster's "binarism" – his extreme distinction between "first media age" of centralized broadcasting media and "second media age" of de-centralized computer-mediated communication. For Tomlinson (1999a, 215, footnote 1), the main issue is the "deterritorializing potential" of media, a potential which is inherent both in television in the internet, so that there is no need for a "sharp distinction" between these two technologies. By comparison, Tomlinson's (2007) latest work seems more enthusiastic about the possibility of reading social and cultural change off from the development of the latest information and communication technologies. While Tomlinson makes comments with which he takes distance from technological determinism, he notes a distinction between the earlier modernity of "mechanical velocity" and the coming of a "condition of immediacy", in effect "a drive towards the abolition of distance and separation", the foremost factor behind which is the increasing presence and significance of "electronic communications and media systems in the constitution of everyday experience" (ibid., 74–75, 94). In other formulations, Tomlinson is ambivalent about the novelty of recent media-technological changes; at one point, he recapitulates his earlier critique of Poster's dualistic thinking, at the same time as he argues that "new media technologies and the associated practices [...] have been sufficient entirely to undermine this media culture", that is, the earlier media culture of broadcast television (ibid., 95). Whatever the ambivalences, a media-technological thinking guides Tomlinson's analysis of speed and immediacy; he even sides with Lash's *Critique of Information* (ibid., 122) in suggesting that the ideological function of the media may not be as significant as Raymond Williams argued, in the latter's criticisms of McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message".

analysis of globalization and culture. Yet there are reasons why it makes sense to treat his particular work under discussion here as representative of cultural globalization theory, rather than as a work that belongs to the same register as that of Castells or Lash. I will spell out the reasons shortly, but first note that this claim is made more complicated by the fact that there are also grounds for a third alternative: namely, the argument that there are no large differences between what I have termed the media-technological paradigm and cultural globalization theory. Both treat globalization as increasing interconnectedness between different parts of the world, and such an emphasis is bound to direct attention to the capabilities of media and communications technologies. These affinities are visible also in Appadurai's work, when (1996, 29), among other things, he gestures towards McLuhan and Meyrowitz as theorists who have alerted cultural analysts to the differences between "a print-dominated world" and a "new condition of neighborliness" with distant others that electronic media has made possible. The academic globalization debate at large has meant a revival for medium theory, once neglected in cultural theory and cultural studies (not to speak of cultural anthropology), but now welcomed as a source of deep insight (see Meyrowitz 2003, 205–208).

While there are, then, something like elective affinities between a media-technological view of globalization and cultural globalization theory, these do not amalgamate into one paradigm. It is not accidental that Tomlinson explicitly distances himself both from Giddens's reduction of the cultural dimensions of globalization to communication technologies and from Castell's simplistic treatment of cultural identities. He notes that Williams's (1974) or Stevenson's (1995, 137–138) critiques of media-technological determinism are largely valid, though he also thinks that the "important questions" that medium-theorists have raised should not be shrugged off (Tomlinson 1999a, 215, footnote 2). Nonetheless, Tomlinson's analysis of how media and communications technology deterritorialize (ibid., 180) is different from Meyrowitz's (1985) research into how electronic media induce a "flattening" of social hierarchies and roles, conceived in intra-societal terms. In contrast, Tomlinson relates media and communications to a discussion of cultural homogenization versus heterogenization on a global level. For Meyrowitz (1985, 6, 131–132), the impact of electronic media for group identity is one of homogenization, since former walls that have separated and maintained distinct groups with distinct identities are disintegrating in the integrated media universe experienced by all. For Appadurai and for Tomlinson, electronic media are a major deterritorializing force: they stand for "the unleashing of the imagination" and the "deterritorialization of self-identity", disseminating distant cultural imageries that penetrate local lifeworlds (Appadurai 1996, 31; Tomlinson 1999a, 118–120). The result is a stupefying variety of hybrid cultural experiences which link identity-formation to identifications whose targets may come from anywhere in the globe. The vexed question of pluralist cultural identities and their textual-constructionist foundations are what distinguishes cultural globalization theory from media-technological understanding of culture and globalization; the exponents of the former do not assume that strong communal identities and real (not just constructed) shared experiences necessarily

form the backbone of a true self, as is the case in McLuhan's tribal visions or in Castells's discussions of the "power of identity".

To sum up the review and discussion in this section, cultural globalization theory – as presented in the work of Tomlinson and Appadurai – links the media and communications to a certain view of cultural identity and its construction. This view is also the basis for a cosmopolitan political vision, as will be noted later on. The same theoretical orientation that characterizes the treatment of media and communications in cultural globalization theory has also permeated media research proper, especially the field of "international communication" (which is actually an oxymoron for the orientation that I am discussing here). Both areas have become blurred, proceeding from a similar understanding of how mediated and cultural practices should be analyzed. The key point in this fusion of fields is a) a shift from a territorial (local, national or regional) analysis of culture, to an analysis of culture that links everything to its deterritorialization or hybridization; and b) the assumption that the media are the main force that brings distant cultural symbols and expressions into the reach of individuals, in ways which could not be possible otherwise. They thus offer an abundance of material for endless cultural interbreedings.

In terms of media studies, this shift shines through in the prominence given to "diasporic media" since the mid-1990s. Mandaville (2003), for example, notes that diasporic media are not only involved in maintaining a "given community". Furthermore, they offer "spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined" (*ibid.*, 135). Following Hall (1995), Sinclair and Cunningham (2000, 17) similarly argue that "cultures never remain static, 'pure' and true to their origin, particularly in the process of diaspora". Diasporic culture in this new perspective is thus the product of the constantly configuring process that occurs when immigrant or otherwise displaced cultures selectively adapt to host cultures, intermingling and evolving to form a regenerative new culture, a culture related to, but yet distinct from, both the original home and host cultures". This notion exceeds any particular setting. From such a stand-point, it could be argued that "the diasporic experience becomes not so much a metaphor as the archetype for the kind of cultural adaptiveness that our era demands" (*ibid.*, 22).

The concepts of diaspora, deterritorialization and hybridization undermine the expectation that cultures are pure, authentic and geographically bounded. The origins and locations of culture have become, in the cultural globalization perspective, subjected to the eroding powers of influences that emanate from far and wide, facilitated by the media and eroding the sense of place and replacing it with a deterritorialized sense of placelessness. This process should not be subjected to an outdated romantic moralization of the loss of something genuine and original (Tomlinson 1999a, 110–113). It is simply the way in which modernization now evolves. Welsch (1999, *passim*) argues – and Appadurai and Tomlinson would agree here – that we must replace both the traditional Herderian notion of organic and ethnically consolidated cultures and even the much more recent idea of "multiculturality" (which, although critical of cultural homogeneity, still assumes the existence of cultures as "mosaics") with something like a

“transculturality”, a concept that regards cultures today as constituted by “new forms of entanglement” and extensive interconnections. These explode the spatial distinctions between what is internal and what is external, Welsch argues, especially because, thanks to global media and communications, there is no longer “anything absolutely ‘foreign’”, in the same way as there “is no longer anything exclusively ‘own’ either” (ibid., 198). All this has clear implications for the analysis of cultural domination and globalization, to which theme I now turn.

## 6.5 The Rejection of “Cultural Imperialism”

As was noted in Chapter 3, there have been many kinds of critiques of the theory of cultural imperialism in recent decades. Before noting the critical position that is distinctive for cultural globalization theory, let me recapitulate two of the most common counter-arguments. One of them is the claim that local production has gained strength in the “periphery” and that “contraflows” have become powerful in international communication. Straubhaar (2000) affirms this by pointing to several international studies on Latin American and Asian television that were conducted between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. The main finding of these studies was that most nations were reducing US imports and producing an increasing amount of programs of their own (ibid., 210). In addition, Southern media producers were not only becoming strong domestic players. Since the 1980s, they have managed to penetrate international media markets both in the North and in the South (ibid.). Some observers greeted these changes as a sign of something completely different, maybe even “reverse media imperialism” (Rogers and Antola 1985, 33). Others, more realistically, have written of the formation of more multi-centred global media markets which, however, have made the patterns of global cultural domination more complex. For instance, there is now no need to take it for granted that “Americanization” of the world is the most pressing problem for local or national cultures in different parts of the world, since “for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization” or “Japanization for Koreans”, etc. (Appadurai 1996, 32).

The second major critique of the cultural imperialism position involves the allegation that its conception of media audiences and reception is rudimentary, a point which resonates with the rise of theories of active audience in cultural studies. Boyd-Barrett (1998, 168) writes that critics are right in arguing against the media imperialism model, which assumed that there was a “simple correlation between colonization of communication space and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of audiences”. Such simplifications have all the negative connotations associated with the trope of “hypodermic needle”, the notion according to which the trademark of bad media research is the anticipation that media have direct and predictable effects on feeble audiences. Tomlinson (1999a, 85) associates this error with a flawed concept of culture at the heart of cultural imperialism theory. For him, culture is the process of “existentially meaningful symbolization”. The problem with the cultural imperialism argument is in that “it makes a leap of inference from the simple presence of cultural



goods to the attribution of deeper cultural or ideological effects" (ibid., 83–84; see also Tomlinson 1991, 41–50). Even if peripheral audiences have to make do primarily with a Western media diet – which is by no means certain anymore – they still make reinterpretations of those symbolic products on the basis of their own cultural understandings. Furthermore, the disregard for the interpretative work of audiences is patronizing, according to the critics, as it assumes that Western cultural forms constitute the absolute centre of the universe and that they easily overrun “weaker” cultures with their passive media consumers (Hannerz 1991, 109; Appadurai 1996, 29; Tomlinson 1997, 181). In reality, culturally situated audiences interact with what is being offered to them in manifold ways, showing remarkable resistance to outside influences.

Both of the above refutations of “cultural imperialism”, as can be observed, have been taken up also by Appadurai and Tomlinson in their work. Yet they only go half the way (at the most) as far as we are discussing the position of cultural globalization theory and its critique of the notion of cultural imperialism. What Appadurai, Tomlinson and other cultural globalization theorists are proposing is a more thorough cultural complexity, which challenges the so-called boundary-thinking that informs more traditional culturalist analyses of media and globalization. Thus the main point for them is not a claim made for cultural authenticity, such as the emphasis that “local” or “national” forms of production or consumption are challenging former relations of domination in global media traffic. It is the argument that the contemporary moment is marked by cultural complexity through and through; it is the reformulation of the concept of culture in a manner which assumes that the relationships between cultures and units of space are artificial on every level (local, national, regional, global). We thus face unfathomable difficulties if we try to pinpoint the “centre” or the “periphery” as hard empirical facts of the “world system”: such spatially fixed categories are all social constructs in the end, like beads in a kaleidoscope whose configurations keep changing constantly without any recurrent hierarchical pattern.

Some illustrations from the work of previously mentioned authors highlight this kaleidoscopic or rhizomic vision of culture. For instance, Nederveen Pieterse (2003, 79) unravels the mystery of Americanization by asking: “To *which* unit of analysis does this apply – to which America, whose America?” He answers that the United States is an extremely heterogeneous country and also subject to trends of “Europeanization, Asianization and Latinatization” of its economy and culture which further complicates the picture. The centre is deterritorialized and so is the periphery. Appadurai criticizes the cultural imperialism position by claiming that the “new global cultural economy” is a “disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models”; yet he also argues against simplistic culturalist theories, because he adds that “even those [models] that might account for multiple centers and peripheries” are no longer adequate (ibid., 32). Tomlinson (1991, 84) finds that it is misleading to think of “cultural imperialism as the eclipse of one national identity by another more powerful one”, since “we now recognize that national identities are not cultural belongings rooted in deep quasi-natural attachments to a homeland, but, rather, complex cultural constructions that have arisen in specific historical conditions”. Boyd-Barrett (1998, 167) goes along with this, although from a perspective of redemptive



critique of cultural imperialism theory, when he notes that it is too simple a solution to examine nation-states as basic building blocks of comparative analysis of media on a global level: this is so because they are complex hybrids made up of various cultural and social elements that do not constitute a singular unit. Thus the whole notion of “international communication” has become precarious. A de-nationalized idea of “global media” is preferred by cultural globalization theorists and reformers of the media-cultural imperialism theory.

We can see, then, how the poststructuralist emphasis of cultures as hybrid or deterritorialized entities challenges the assumptions of cultural imperialism. This emphasis can be established on purely logical or conceptual grounds, even without any specific need for empirical confirmation. The empirical research of “global media” (a truly megalomaniac task if taken literally) may lie beyond practical bounds anyhow, regardless of the specific orientation from which it is pursued (Tomlinson 1991, 55). The reasoning is this: if there are no national hierarchies (they are constructs because nations are necessarily imaginary constructs), then there is no reason to speak of external control, nations as agents, new world information and communication orders, cultural autonomy or cultural imperialism. In a rhizomic global system, there are no centres and no peripheries (and are not such concepts ethnocentric to begin with?), no sense of what is internal and what is external to the system. Furthermore, this means that the flows of media or culture cannot be identified as originating from some spatially definable starting point. There are also therefore no “one-way streets” from the West to the rest (or, as one hopes, another lane back). Using vocabulary from chaos theory (see section 2.2), Appadurai (1996, 46) claims that cultural forms today are “fundamentally fractal [...] possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities”. If we follow this logic, then we have to conclude that global cultural flows are *acentric*, and this is something the theory of culture imperialism, backed up with an out-dated world systems theory perspective, clearly cannot handle.

Case closed? Not yet, for there is still one more matter, mentioned briefly in the above. On the basis of the whole theoretical armoury of globalization, the theory of cultural imperialism has been exposed to a truly incriminating normative charge. It relates to the same allegedly ossified concept of nation mentioned above. According to critics, cultural imperialism arguments can easily be utilized in the endorsement of national interests and ideologies against a myriad of “foreign influences” (see Curran 2002, 169) – a rhetorical device used by authoritarian governments especially in the developing countries so as to justify measures ranging from cultural protectionism to censorship, repression and other forms of media and population control. Speaking of the “left end of the spectrum of media studies” (i.e., media researchers of the political economy tradition), Appadurai (1996, 32) remarks that their fears “of homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more real than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies”. Such strategies are reprehensible in themselves, but also for the reason that the picture of authentic cultural spaces in need of protection and “unsullied by cultural imperialism” (Morley 2006, 37) fails to be analytically convincing.

The prosecutors have made a strong case here, and the seriousness of such charges would certainly make any theoretical opponent tremble. If the jury would consist only of cultural globalization theorists, the final verdict on the cultural imperialism school would already have been passed. Against the hopeful position of cultural globalization theory, cultural imperialism theory comes across as pallid and pessimistic. It seems to be incapable of offering encouraging visions such as the following: "I do believe the style of cultural experience and identification is bound to be affected by the complex and multiform interrelations, penetrations, and cultural mutations that characterize the globalization of our current stage of modernity", the rise of "more complex identity positions, but also different modes of cultural identification" (Tomlinson 1999a, 105).

However, Tomlinson is not oblivious to the continuation of former economic and cultural power relations. He points out, despite all of his (1991) earlier remarks concerning the contradictions and lack of clarity of the concept and theory of "culture imperialism", that it still has some merit, based on three reasons: a) the ubiquity of Western cultural goods; b) the long history of Western imperialism; and c) the centrality of capitalism as a cultural influence (Tomlinson 1997, 174–180). However, these merits pale in comparison, from Tomlinson's perspective, when set against the need to disentangle political-economic power from cultural power – which cultural imperialism theorists have failed to do – and against the "fresh look" offered by his and others' theory of globalization, with which "we end up with an image of a decentred network" (ibid., 185). It is this decentred network and the complex deterritorialized identity positions it fosters which result in "shifts in the balance of global power" or, more precisely, the downfall of Western economic and cultural power (ibid., 186).

If we accept these criticisms, the unavoidable conclusion is that history has walked over the corpse of cultural imperialism theory. Given this, how should we assess Boyd-Barrett's (2006) or Bhuiyan's (2008) recent analyses of global information and communication technology industries and information society discourses, which they see as examples of media imperialism and neo-imperial hegemonic strategies in action? Are these analyses only vestiges of an ancient paradigm destined to go under as the assumptions of cultural globalization theory become more and more generally accepted? I see that there is a real danger in how "textbooks now narrate a linear account of intellectual progress in which those mired in the error of cultural imperialism dogma have been corrected by the sages of cultural globalization theory" (Curran 2002, 174). Are we forced to take the cultural critique at face value? As I see it, there are two important issues involved here: first, we must ask if there are no redeemable qualities in the so-called cultural imperialism thesis whatsoever (such that it could not be reworked to match better with contemporary realities); and second, is the critique of cultural imperialism of such a kind that it makes all analyses of cultural globalization from a critical economic point of view redundant, as is regularly implied by cultural globalization theorists?

Kraidy (2005, 27) makes a very perceptive point when he notes that "the fact that many critics still spend substantial print space outlining the deficiencies of cultural imperialism has imbued the thesis with a residual life-after-death attraction that continues to expose the lack of a solid alternative". The fact that cultural imperialism

still needs to be “reconsidered” (Morley 2006) testifies not to the misguidedness of such efforts, but rather, to the recognition that cultural globalization theory has deficiencies of its own. It is weak as a critical theory of global media, particularly in a period that is characterized by a neoliberalist political-economic agenda that took root in the 1980s. The continuation of that agenda has made it certain that there are still hierarchical and hegemonic forms of domination in global economic and cultural relations that cannot be explained away with the concepts used by cultural globalization theorists.

I will offer my own further comments on how the theory of cultural imperialism should be treated in the present context later on, but the point that I want to stress here is that the understanding of domination in cultural globalization theory is such that it is in danger of becoming totally vitiated. Where is its vision and utopia? Trying to survive without the notion of domination and critical concepts such as imperialism, neoliberalism or capitalism, cultural globalization theorists seek solace from the “radically open cultural future” that lies ahead (Tomlinson 1997, 190; see also Appadurai 1996, 47). Yet there is one distinctive cultural construct against which they direct considerable argumentative power: the nation-state. Its alleged demise offers the necessary vision that they can present as the replacement for other types of visions that would target “the blatant injustices and inequities of contemporary corporate capitalism” (Gupta 2002, 255). What cultural globalization theorists offer as an off-set for their limited utopianism in that respect is the vision of post-nationalism and/or cosmopolitanism. This theme and its linkages to media constitute the last part of my review of cultural globalization theory.

## 6.6 The Media and Cosmopolitanism

The proposition that we are witnessing the downfall of the nation-state system and the rise of a cosmopolitan world is a central assertion of cultural globalization theory. Cosmopolitanism became a booming topic in political, social and cultural theory in the 1990s. Recent discussions of cosmopolitanism within the academic globalization debate have been divided mainly according to two sub-themes: a political theory of “global governance” and a cultural theory of cosmopolitan identity (see e.g. Held 2002b). Before noting the latter theme, which is more crucial for the subject of this Chapter, I want to lay down the principles of the former, too, since both themes are consequential for my review here.

While becoming particularly noticeable in the 1990s, contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism carry on an age-old tradition. In a classical sense, the notion of cosmopolitanism in Western thought refers to the idea that instead of showing exclusive allegiance to their immediate reference groups (based on locality, ethnicity or nation), all people have the capability to think of themselves as belonging to humanity as a whole. The notion of each person as a “citizen of the world”, derived from its Greek etymology, was elaborated from the third century BCE onwards by Stoic philosophers and their followers. They sketched a cosmopolitan theory of the world as a rational, orderly and peaceful whole governed by a universal natural law whereby the humanity

formed “a single moral, if not political society” (Neff 2005, 32). Similar philosophical projects followed in the wake of empire-building in pre-modern Europe and Middle East. The Catholic Church and Ottoman Empire, for instance, saw themselves as the guarantors of such a benevolent “world order”.

The modern roots of cosmopolitanism are associated with the Enlightenment and especially with Immanuel Kant, who presented a theory of “cosmopolitan right”. The concept of cosmopolitan right “connoted the capacity to present oneself and be heard within and across political communities”, that is, “the right to enter dialogue without artificial constraint and delimitation” (Held 2002a, 310) on the part of the church or powerful nation-states, for example. Through these Enlightenment discourses, the idea of “cosmopolitan democracy” was put on the intellectual map in ways that lead directly to current debates over the public sphere.

The arrival of cosmopolitanism in its modern version was not based only on Enlightenment ethics, for it was also accompanied by the strengthening of global capitalism from mid-to-late nineteenth century onwards. The first cited occurrence of the word “cosmopolitan” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* comes from John Stuart Mill, who wrote in 1848 that “Capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan” (quoted in Calhoun 2002, 886). The same year marked the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels (1998 [1848], 54), in which they noted that the rising bourgeoisie had “through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country”. They observed that national industries “no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones”, and that their “products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe”. Furthermore, Marx and Engels argued that “new wants” were being created, “requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands”. Out of these factors of globalized production and consumption arose “intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations”, which had the cultural consequence that “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature”. (Ibid., 55)

The point that I want to make regarding the above citations of Marx and Engels is not related to the last remark (the rise of “a world literature”), which could be seen as an anticipation of very different trends: both the coming of a global “monoculture” (a claim rejected by cultural globalization theorists), or the onset of post-territorial hybrid cultural forms (confirmed by them). Rather, it is that Marx and Engels identify the same forces (integrated global capitalism and the demise of nationalism) that come up in contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism (see Held 2002a, 311–313). Of course, these forces are interpreted very differently in modern cosmopolitan thought. David Held, who is an authoritative representative of political cosmopolitanism, bases his arguments on a reworking of Kant’s ideas. For him, the contemporary cosmopolitan theory is “a moral frame of reference for specifying rules and principles that can be universally shared” (ibid., 311). Humanity forms “a single moral realm” in which each person should be respected and recognized as having equal value, both in terms of their universal human rights and their claims to take part in public decision-making (ibid., 310–311). Thus understood, cosmopolitanism is not satisfactory as an ethical principle alone. It should

also be a project for the establishment of institutions that could guarantee such rights and forms of rational dialogue in practice. This entails “the entrenchment of accessible and open public forums” (ibid., 313) and the strengthening and creation of democratic institutions of “global governance” in the area of international law, for instance.

These aspirations go beyond a traditional liberal democratic view (and reality) which is content with a limited conception of democracy, a more apt name for which is in fact polyarchy, “a system in which a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections carefully managed by competing elites” (Robinson 1996, 49). Instead of such deficient procedures, the creation of more substantive democratic structures should be the overriding goal of politics today, according to cosmopolitanists. “Global governance” is also needed in order to overcome the narrow discourse of “national interest” which is commonly evoked as a justification for policies that show contempt for all those bodies of political representation that serve the interests of humanity and not just a portion of it.

The contemporary political theory of cosmopolitanism, in the form outlined above, has been criticized from various perspectives. One of these is the so-called realist theory of international relations (e.g. Gilpin 2002). Its exponents argue that the normative wish for “global governance” is a childish dream, because the international domain is a field of eternal struggle where strong nation-states – or sometimes even a single hegemonic power – dominate weaker ones and maintain “order” in the process (today, the US). It should be noted that this particular theory is both morally questionable and analytically reified, as it reduces the nation-state to a predator, forgets the internal political divisions of the state, sees world politics as anarchy regulated by warfare (and therefore in need of masters and servants) and fails to see that nations do not act as unconnected units in the international state system (Kiely 2005, 57). From another side of the fence, those Marxists who follow the analysis of imperialism characterized by either strong inter-imperialist rivalry among leading states, or, alternatively, the theory of “super-imperialism” that assumes an unquestioned US hegemony in the capitalist world, are similarly unconvinced by cosmopolitanist arguments (ibid., 62). Regardless of ideological differences, what both of these currents of thought express is the claim that world politics continues to be based on national interests, defined either by the state (realism), or state and capital together (Marxism).

There are of course other forms of critique of cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, these two examples are enough to note that, confronted with the claim concerning the continuity of nation-state power as the structuring principle of global politics, cosmopolitanists argue that their programme is not a projection for the future but a description of a growing reality. Held (2002a, 320) argues that cosmopolitan norms and legal frameworks have already been established, “as political authority and new forms of governance are diffused ‘below’, ‘above’ and ‘alongside’ the nation-state, and as new forms of international law, from the law of war to human rights law and environmental regimes, begin to set down universal standards”. Cosmopolitan globalization theorists point to a huge increase in the number of international institutions in the last 60 years. For example, UN organs, WTO, EU and OECD extend the principle of regulation across state borders; the principle of international rule of law is materialized in the proceedings

of the International Criminal Court; and the ideal of humanity as a single moral whole is expressed in international declarations and treaties concerning human rights (Scholte 2000, 138–151). In addition to the multiplication of inter-governmental organizations, there has also been an upsurge in the number of non-governmental organizations (e.g., Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch) that work beyond the confines of nation-state management. Held notes that cosmopolitan principles are often compromised in the practices of international organizations (they succumb to the interests of powerful nations). They are not given enough weight in the mind of leading politicians and they are weakened by the lack of effective enforcement and oversight. Yet he is confident, together with many other theorists of cosmopolitanism, that a “multilayered” global political system is already in the making and that this testifies against belief in the continuity of unchecked power of dominant nation-states and capital (Held 2002a, 314–317).

According to modern political cosmopolitanists, the trend towards the strengthening of supra-national institutions is not only occurring, but also must of necessity occur. Growing risks associated with international drugs trade, terrorism and pandemics are spreading in ways which can not be contained within individual nation-states. National governments also face immense problems in dealing with the regulation of genetic engineering, global finance or the effects of global warming that are equally pervasive (Held 2002a, 307–308). Held (2002b, 7) argues that state institutions and political agents are “increasingly like ‘zombies’” in the face of such flows.

Modern cosmopolitanist theory involves the idea of universalism, and as such it has its own dangers, according to critics, in terms of “the question of who sets the ‘universal’ norms” (Kiely 2005, 54). The Kantian foundation of cosmopolitanism posits a singular world community based on universal norms. This is something that Held (2002b, 12) thinks is in need of reworking. Such reworking means that the tradition of modern cosmopolitanism, and the vision of global governance which is a descendant of it, comes necessarily into contact with a postmodern version of cosmopolitanism. Both currents acknowledge the need to protect human dignity and to have a sense of commitment to the world in which “there are no others” (Tomlinson 1999a, 194). However, in the postmodern version, this principle is met with “an almost opposite sensibility: an awareness of the world as one of *many* cultural others” (ibid.). In dealing with postmodern cosmopolitanism, we thus come back to the familiar logic that guides cultural globalization theory: the tendency to reduce all questions to matters of multiple or displaced cultural identities. Discussing the matter, Held (2002b, 12) notes that “cultural cosmopolitanism” is interested above all in the issue of cultural diversity. This orientation is evidently based on something else than traditionally culturalist or communitarian approaches that celebrate the existence of local or national difference as such. Again, the principle that reigns supreme is the one based on poststructuralist theory, which seeks to bypass all fixed boundaries. The “possible fluidity of individual identity” and its never-ending hybridization, as Held (ibid.) correctly observes, is emphasized in postmodern cosmopolitanism (which I think is a correct name for this particular tendency, in place of Held’s more vague expression, noted above).

Ulrich Beck (2005) has recently embraced postmodern cosmopolitanism in his elaboration of a “critical theory with a cosmopolitan intent”. He writes of the poverty of “multiculturalism”, which proposes “an essentialist identity and rivalry between cultures”. Instead of this flawed concept, Beck thinks that global cultural differences should be interpreted by means of the category of individualization which is, in turn, organically tied to cosmopolitanism. In the cosmopolitan world of today, people are “set free” from “hierarchical and political units based on territory and ethnicity” and thrown into a “borderline” existence, living their lives as members of different communities at the same time, thus even realizing “global society [...] in the microcosm of [their] own experiential space”. This individualization-through-cosmopolitanism leads to a point which Beck repeats many times over: the “radical rediscovery and acknowledgement of the other”. The further argument is that the theory of such developments constitutes “an invigorating self-critique of Western modernity” and former nation-state-centred sociological perspectives (*ibid.*, 284–285).

Even then, the key observation here is that in the postmodern version of cosmopolitanism, the probing of institutional structures of global governance recedes to the background. Its place is taken by the discussion of “mental” landscapes of the cosmopolitan world. Arguments concerning the media are easily suited for this perspective. Appadurai (2002, 43), who hardly even utters the word cosmopolitanism in his works, nevertheless writes of the same thing when he claims that the “Westphalian” state system is now facing “transnational loyalties” fuelled by diasporas and “mobile, media-linked communities of migrants” who “are redrawing the relationships of locations and affiliation”. He mentions regional politics and “global economic regimes” as further factors that undermine the nation-state, but contrasts these with the claim there are big problems of “inclusion” in turning the international community into “an instrument of global governance”. The modern cosmopolitan promise is undercut by the fact that the international community is “primarily a landscape of conscience more than a political or legal formation” (*ibid.*).

The dismissal of “global governance” and the presentation of media-related arguments are also at the core of Tomlinson’s discussion of cosmopolitanism. He writes that cosmopolitanism is a necessary ethical goal in a globalized world, but that it proceeds without much institutional support (Tomlinson 1999a, 198–199). “For all practical purposes”, cosmopolitanism is a “cultural disposition”; thus, “we probably have to become cosmopolitans without the prospects of a cosmopolis” (*ibid.*, 199). The reason for this modest conclusion is based on the rejection of “universal rationality”, a claim that covers the discussion of the media as well. In particular, Tomlinson rejects Garnham’s (1992) plea for building universally binding and democratically accountable structures of “global public sphere”, together with the latter’s critique of postmodern cosmopolitanism and the relativist celebration of difference therein. Tomlinson (1999a, 193) acknowledges that there are indeed perils with postmodern relativism, but these must be counterbalanced by the “robust, single-minded universalism” voiced by the likes of Garnham. The fact of the matter is, Tomlinson argues, that people “simply do have different cultural perspectives and cultural-political interests” that are mismatched with “any universal human interest” (*ibid.*).



What sources are there, then, for the project of cosmopolitanism? In answering this, Tomlinson turns specifically to the media. The argument is three-fold, following the course of statement, qualification and restatement. First, cosmopolitanism is carried on by “the penetration of our homes by media and communications technology”, which is a crucial force, together with increasing travel, of mundane deterritorialization, holding out “the promise of vital aspects of the cosmopolitan disposition: the awareness of the wider world” (Tomlinson 1999a, 199–200). Thus people can “become ‘cosmopolitans’ in their living-rooms through the routine exposure to cultural difference and the constant reminder of the wider world beyond their locality” (ibid., 202). Second, both the traditional electronic media and the new technologies of cyberspace do not guarantee by themselves, as technologies, the rise of the kind of morally engaging cosmopolitan practices that Tomlinson envisions (ibid., 203–204). The media may also be instruments for emotional detachment (ibid., 176). The willingness to “do anything with the experiences available via media technologies has to come from other sources – ultimately within the situated lifeworld of the self (ibid., 204). Nevertheless, “communications and media technologies can give us [a] significant degree of access to the world and even, perhaps, new modes of distanced interaction”, which “are not to be despise[d] or underestimated” (ibid.). In the end, then, what we can say is this: because of the cultural condition of deterritorialization, cosmopolitanism is “plausibly within our grasp” and remains a “possibility” (ibid., 207).

Appadurai’s (1996) vision has similar elements. However, it is dominated by one overriding concern that is truly distinctive of his work: the exposition of the role of the nation-state as an obstacle to new forms of collective imagination. His account is damning: the nation is “the ideological alibi of the territorial state [...] the last refuge of ethnic totalitarianism” (ibid., 159). Its existence has resulted in the worst scenes of terror that the modern era has witnessed. Yet in the “multiethnic settings” of cultural globalization, nations have proved to be “tenuous collective projects, not eternal natural facts” (ibid., 162). This is now fundamentally important. Appadurai suggests that nation-states have become “obsolete” as “we are moving to a global order” where “global traffic in resources, images, and ideas [...] either contest the nation-state actively or constitute peaceful alternatives for large-scale political loyalties” (ibid., 169). The legitimacy of nations, according to Appadurai, is founded on its capability to discipline, fashion and mobilize the life-worlds of its citizens within the “body of bounded territory” (ibid., 189). This implies necessarily homogeneity, “the incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity” (ibid., 177).

Giving these emphases, it is possible to understand why Appadurai writes with such passion of the emergence of “a postnational imaginary” (instead of cosmopolitanism) as his overriding normative vision. Because of his theoretical choices, the media is bound to play the role of positive resource in realizing this vision. It is an assistant in the mercy killing of the nation-state, which has entered “a terminal crisis” (Appadurai 1996, 21). As should be recalled, Appadurai considers nations to be imaginary constructs; as such, these constructs can be replaced by other ones. He (ibid., 21–22) notes that Anderson (1983) did a great service by identifying the ways in which print media “played a key role in imagining the nation”. Today, new imaginings are possible, “as mass



mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media [...], and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries" (Appadurai 1996, 22). Nations are in for troubled times, since the work of containing imagination is subject to "steady erosion, principally due to the force and form of electronic mediation, of the relationship between spatial and virtual neighborhoods" (ibid., 189).

In an important passage that develops this theme, Appadurai (1996, 195) writes of electronically mediated virtual neighborhoods (the internet) as "context-producing" rather than "context-driven": they create "a more complicated, disjunct, hybrid sense of local subjectivity", which flies in the face of the "largely negative pressures that the nation-state places on the production of context by local subjects" (ibid., 197). Appadurai remarks that besides the nation-state, "major media conglomerates" also conduct surveillance on subjects. Yet the former is for him the great homogenizing force. Its final exit from history is not written in the stars, but we all should work towards that primary goal, lest we end up wandering eternally in "a museum devoted to memories of Westphalia" (Appadurai 2002, 44). A hopeful conclusion is offered by Appadurai (1996, 23): "In the longer run, free of the constraints of the nation form, we may find that cultural freedom and sustainable justice in the world do not presuppose the uniform and general existence of the nation-state" and this "unsettling possibility could be the most exciting dividend of living in modernity at large".

In Appadurai's discussion of post-national order or in Tomlinson's arguments about cosmopolitanism, there is not much more about media and communications. Because the conclusion offered by them is that media and communications just offer "possibilities" for cosmopolitan identity – and even this must be qualified heavily – their postmodern cosmopolitanism comes across as a very modest critical resource indeed. This impression is strengthened further by the fact that as Appadurai's and Tomlinson's visions of post-nationalism or cosmopolitanism are already substantially contained within the concept of cultural globalization itself (or deterritorialization, or hybridization, or similar terms), those visions seem to be merely additive. Having said this, however, I do not want to rush to conclusions immediately. While the issue of postmodern cosmopolitanism may indeed be a relatively weak ingredient of cultural globalization theory, it still belongs centrally to that paradigm, together with the previously reviewed themes.

## 6.7 Evaluation

There are real merits in Appadurai's and Tomlinson's work on cultural globalization: their analyses have underscored the complexity of contemporary cultural flows, and as such they have formed an effective antidote to views which define cultural globalization too squarely as a process of either homogenization or heterogenization, or worse still, decay it in the name of "the renewal of Western identity" (Huntington 1996, 318). Both Appadurai and Tomlinson are motivated by the attempt to highlight and elaborate the mutually constitutive relationship between the concepts of culture and globalization. First, culture is deemed by Appadurai and Tomlinson as a crucial dimension of

globalization, since the latter is not just a technological or an economic process but also a symbolic-expressive one; second, globalization changes our understanding of culture, as it has produced a human condition in which meanings and identities are created in ways which are less and less determined by attachments to fixed physical locations. The concepts of deterritorialization and hybridization are offered as the master categories with which we can understand this culture-globalization dialectic. They are used to back up the claim that the world is now so radically de-centred that former critical analyses of international imbalances in cultural exchange no longer apply to our situation. What we now have, on the basis of that hybridity and de-centredness, is a world of increasingly cosmopolitan (or post-national) outlooks. Cultural globalization is a cause for hope: it has opened up new horizons for cultural dialogue and mutual recognition, freeing us from the barriers that ethnically homogenizing nation-states have set up. Electronic media and communications are central instigators of these developments, the necessary tools with the help of which cultural globalization theorists construct their sanguine arguments.

These are, in a nutshell, the essentials of what we can distil from the review above. At first sight, it is easy to point to certain basic issues that give general support to the theoretical outline offered by Appadurai and Tomlinson. Empirically, it is true that the world is more culturally complex than ever before, if the criterion by which we measure this is the intensity of how different cultural meanings now come into contact with each other. Certainly, the global flows of media and migration in the past decades have made the question of identity more pressing for an increasing amount of people, forcing them to re-orientate themselves culturally. Theoretically, the views developed in cultural globalization theory present further challenges to the kind of “centre-periphery models” of international media and culture to which Appadurai objects. Appadurai, in particular, is creative and suggestive in his development of new concepts that are designed to substitute former models, such as the famous five “scapes” which have generated much scholarly interest. In media studies, his neologism “mediascape” is useful in that it alerts us to the ways in which, for example, media systems in Western Europe, formerly highly national in character, have been changing (though not totally), as new “diasporic” media have become attached to them (see e.g. Çağlar 2004).

In unison with mainstream academic globalization theory at large, Appadurai and Tomlinson both insist that their analysis of cultural globalization is non-reductive. For Appadurai, the global flows of people, technologies, finance, information and ideology are “disjunctural” or contingent to the extent that we can not “speak of some of these flows as being, for structural or historical reasons, always prior to and formative of other flows” (Appadurai 1996, 47). Global cultural flows are not “random”. Rather, they are canalized into so many context-dependent combinations that they are best described on the basis of the image of “*chaos*, rather than on older images of order, stability, and systematicness” (ibid.). Tomlinson (1999a, 13–17), for his part, refers to the standard attribute of “multidimensionality” in specifying what he considers the proper theoretical approach to globalization. In both cases, the named or implied analytical opponent is Marxism or Neo-Marxism, which is associated with one-dimensionality (the privileging of economy) and the inability to come to terms with globalization as the outcome of

complexly related processes involving not only the economy but also politics, culture and technology (Appadurai 1996, 32–33, Tomlinson 1999a, 16–17). Tomlinson (*ibid.*) adds that he does not want to “diminish the importance of the economic”, but he also strongly advises against the idea “that the economic analysis of transnational capitalism is the royal road to grasping globalization”.

However, we should examine these claims further instead of treating them as proven wisdom. As I argued in Chapter 2, the anti-reductionist ethos of “transformationalist” academic globalization theory – the setting up of (good) explanatory pluralism versus (bad) monism – is in fact dubious since it serves to hide its own assumptions and emphases. The same concerns also Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s cultural globalization theory. When we look at the core concepts that both of them use, that is, the familiar concepts of flows, deterritorialization and hybridization, we find that they all point in the same direction: the transformation of space as the leading development of our age. This is the central analytical backbone of academic globalization theory. Whatever its merits, it is also a form of theoretical reduction, or more precisely, a spatial reduction. The precise form it takes in cultural globalization theory is of course culturally specific: it is the treatment of cultural change from the viewpoint of how extensive flows of media and migration have led to new “imagined worlds” that “spread around the globe” (Appadurai 1996, 33), or of how we now have “expanding cultural horizons via globalized media” (Tomlinson 1999a, 116). That is to say, the spatial reduction of cultural globalization theory merges with the theme of cultural homogenization versus heterogenization that is vital for the paradigm.

Even such an abstract and generalist theoretical reduction – which makes possible, in principle, all kinds of ambiguous statements regarding global cultural developments – has consequences. In the work of Appadurai and Tomlinson, it leads, in practice, to an optimistic scenario regarding the utopian possibilities of media and communications technologies, while it also has the same outcome detected by Loyal (2003, 170) in Giddens’s theory of globalization: namely it “*a priori* rules out any systematic discussion of the economic aspects of globalisation and the expansionary nature of capital”. This is certainly not a self-evident aspect of their work, since both authors, for instance, register and discuss the commodification of culture. Nonetheless, as I will note in the following critique, Appadurai and Tomlinson treat the media, communications and globalization in ways which weaken the force of their work as a critical resource. The main reason for this is their overconfidence in the emancipatory nature of deterritorialization or hybridization, which is based on their selective analysis of power as a cultural and spatial issue. The poverty of that perspective results from its missing counterbalance: the analysis of the expansion of specifically capitalist dynamics in the fields of media and culture, a development which is both cultural-ideological and structural-material at the same time. The instances in which Appadurai and Tomlinson refer to these critical issues are manifestly evasive, yielding at times to an affirmation of the power of capital. In brief, their work suffers from an unwillingness to take distance from what they perceive as the current benevolent logic of cultural change. I will now expand on this critique in relation to each of the sub-topics of cultural globalization theory that were covered in the review above.

### No Centre, No Domination?

The first of these topics is the interrelated theme of deterritorialization and hybridization. What both of these closely connected terms evoke is the claim that we have to think culture without linking it epistemologically to definite, autonomous spaces. It is the idea that cultures and identities exist increasingly as phenomena that cross all borders and symbolic boundaries (defined as regions, nations, race, gender, ethnic origin, cultural authenticity, etc.) and which are thus substantially mixed and decentred. This is then presented as a positive development with enormous political significance – which view, however, can only be sustained if we agree that the main problem today is the continuance of what Nederveen Pieterse (2001, 220) calls “boundary fetishism”, i.e., essentialist thinking concerning culture and identity. The question of whether such a crusade against cultural essentialism constitutes politics and critique worthy of the name is the central bone of contention in debates concerning the implications of hybridity.

Nederveen Pieterse is adamant in his insistence that hybridization is a key to all that is progressive in the contemporary period of intense globalization. He (2004, 53) notes that

“Hybridization is an antidote to the cultural differentialism of racial and nationalist doctrines because it takes as its point of departure precisely those experiences that have been banished, marginalized, tabooed in cultural differentialism. It subverts nationalism because it privileges bordercrossing. It subverts identity politics such as ethnic or other claims to purity and authenticity because it starts out from the fuzziness of boundaries. If modernity stands for an ethos of order and neat separation by tight boundaries, hybridization reflects a postmodern sensibility of cut’n’mix, transgression, subversion. It represents, in Foucault’s terms, a ‘resurrection of subjugated knowledges’ because it foregrounds those effects and experiences which modern cosmologies, whether rationalist or romantic, would not tolerate.”

This is radical postmodern identity politics, the primary premise of which is the disruption of all stable forms of identity and the assumed liberation that this provides. It is sustained by a number of assumptions, two of which should be mentioned here: a) the principle of “radicalized choosing”, that is, the idea that the individual makes him/herself by choosing “amongst the pastiche of possibilities, past, present and future”; and b) the principle of “boundary crossing”, which shows up in the praise lavished on the “virtue of the borderless world” and in the notion that “being related to territory is *always* a root cause of conflict” (James 2006, 305). Together with the tendency to view everything through the prism of language and difference, these principles coalesce into a theory in which cultural globalization becomes synonymous with emancipation.

In cultural globalization theory, the worst things imaginable are all those forces that maintain essentialisms and control boundaries. Chief among these are nations, always

to a lesser or to a greater extent based on discourses of homogenous ethnicity which have caused disastrous effects in the form of mass killings and genocide (Appadurai 1996, 154; Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 234–235). In the recent past and today, however, because of deterritorialization and hybridization, new boundary crossing imaginaries are gaining strength. National essentialisms may still be present in the consciousness of subjects, but history progresses onwards and they are giving way to “globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai 1996, 31). Thus Appadurai writes of “diasporic public spheres” and “postnational formations” – expressions which refer back to the disruption of stable forms of identity – and notes that imagination has now become “central to all forms of agency” (ibid., 22, 164, 31). As noted, the electronic media are decisive for this development, according to Appadurai, together with the flows of people (which, however, are themselves highly mediated). A similar ode to globalization’s mode of liberating the formation of identity from its national fetters is offered by Tomlinson. He envisions that “the transnational cultural economy perhaps provide a figure for what a future ‘globalized popular culture’ may turn out to be like: different, that is, in *character* from the integrating, ‘essentializing’ nature of national cultures, looser-textured, more protean and relatively indifferent to the maintenance of sharp discriminations of cultural origin and belonging” (Tomlinson 1999a, 147).

Regardless of the conditional style of the last citation, Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s views (and those of Nederveen Pieterse) are problematic for two reasons. The first is related to their conception of identities as hybrid entities. In fact, Appadurai and Tomlinson are not putting forward any developed theory of identity. The way in which they argue against essentialist conceptualizations of identity is based on certain implicit (but obvious) postmodern understandings. Its main ingredient is the idea that human selves do not possess an essential inner “core”; instead, identities are constantly shifting cultural constructions that are based on the “mobilization of differences” (Appadurai 1996, 14). For Appadurai, identity (or, more precisely, group identity) is on the same conceptual level as “imagination”. His basic claim, to repeat a point in this particular context, is that whereas in former times of print capitalism, imagination was constricted by the instrumental ideologies of the nation-state, today, in times of electronic capitalism and electronic media, imagination has been deterritorialized, and with this, the cultural materials for “experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of people” (ibid., 3) are rapidly proliferating (see also Barker 2000, 177).

But who is, exactly, doing those “experiments” and under what kind of social conditions? One searches in vain for answers to that question in the work of cultural globalization theorists. The selves who are doing the experimenting in Appadurai’s world seem to be “normotic” personalities that actually have no inner experiences or interpretative capacities, but only ideas that imprint themselves on them “from the outside” (Craib 1998, 3, 8). Previously, this “outside” was for Appadurai the nation as an imagined community; today, it is the global “modernity at large”. What is disturbing here is the way in which Appadurai equates this change in cultural conditions with an increase in human agency. Whereas previously imagination was bounded and essentialist, today it flows more freely and is anti-essentialist (see Tomlinson 2003 for his version of the argument). It is as if globalization has proven the soundness of the

postmodern notion of identity and its positivity. However, the capacity to act politically – or to make experiments with the self and orientate towards new identifications – is not mediated only by those changing cultural conditions. It is also mediated by the place of the subject in the society and its institutions, including upbringing and the social relations of production which determine the range of material resources that the subject has at his or her disposal (Holzkamp 1992). These are factors that are at play in both national and deterritorialized cultural settings. Structural social conditions do not determine the capacity to act of the subject in an all-out fashion. However, in the absence of their inclusion in the analysis (barring some sporadic remarks), the claim made by Appadurai and Tomlinson concerning the agency-enhancing quality of cultural globalization sounds hollow and exaggerated.

The second problematic aspect of the theory of hybridity is also due to its epistemological privileging of “boundary crossings”. On the basis of that privileging, the modern nation becomes its prime target of critique, a veritable bogeyman of cultural globalization theory, with the downside that a critical examination of globalizing capitalism escapes its range of vision. The discussion offered by Appadurai and Tomlinson on this matter is filled with perplexing contradictions and confusions. This is because they both theorize capitalist dynamics in highly selective ways: in practice, by rushing them through their spatially reductionist paradigm. Appadurai (1996, 32), for example, emphasizes the links between “Americanization” and “commodification”, as interchangeable concepts in critical theories of cultural “homogenization”. Tomlinson (1995, 895) makes the same association in his attempt to “avoid the obvious critical strategy”, namely “the route through the critique of commodification which often fetches up in the critique of homogenisation”. This is then followed by a description of how decentred and complex contemporary cultures are, i.e., not homogenous at all.

This is remarkable in light of the fact that theories of hybridization, properly critical, need not posit cultural homogenization in the manner suggested by Appadurai and Tomlinson. As Kraidy (2005) documents, cultural hybridity has been, since the 1990s at the least, a crucial strategy in the transnational practices of global media companies, the life-blood of “corporate transculturalism”, which refers to the use of cultural differences and their mixing as “instruments finely tuned in pursuit of profit” (ibid., 72–115). What this means is that cultural deterritorialization or hybridization is not post-hegemonic (ibid., 149) as such. Yet Appadurai and Tomlinson make it seem that way. Tomlinson (1995, 895–896) argues in the following:

“Global capitalism clearly has cultural consequences. Certainly it tends to spread around a lot of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Coke and Madonna videos. But I don’t think this is its most significant consequence. More significant, I think, is the shift in the locus of control of cultural patterns from a local to a ‘decentred’ global space.”

In another text, Tomlinson (1997, 186, 190) develops a similar argument and emphasizes that current complex cultural flows do not “reproduce the patterns of Western domination”. The nightmare of “the homogenized dystopia” pictured by

cultural imperialism theorists thus gives way to “radically open cultural future”. For the moment, I will leave unexplored for the moment the question of whether the world is now as culturally decentred as Tomlinson claims. Even without noting that issue, however, there is an eye-catching omission in his analysis. It pays scant attention to the neoliberal moment, which has entrenched capitalist dynamics in the field of media and culture all the more vigorously than before, regardless of the coming of a more culturally deterritorialized world. We can thus detect an “empty point of universality” (Žižek 1999, 216) in the anti-essentialism promoted by Tomlinson and other cultural globalization theorists. That stance leads them to underestimate the examination of the logic of capital in culture as yet another form of essentialist thinking. Thus, “the openness towards the wealth of hybrid ethnic, sexual, and so on, identities” leaves them blind to “the massive presence of capitalism as *global* world system” which represents also an “unprecedented homogenization” of that system (ibid., 218).

By framing the issue of cultural homogeneity so that it is reduced to a question of hierarchic patterns of domination between nations, in particular, cultural globalization theorists sweep aside the homogeneity of how the capital and the commodity form dominate cultures everywhere. Combined with the claim according to which Western cultural domination has now been severely weakened, this sweep is bound to clear way for a picture of cultural globalization that radiates with empowerment (see especially Tomlinson 1999b). The concepts of deterritorialization and hybridization are conceptual tools that are meant to demonstrate the radical de-centredness of the world in an economic, political and cultural sense. The poststructuralist theory perspective that informs cultural globalization theory is geared towards the conclusion that if there are no spatial centres – understood as the unquestioning cultural power of Western states or corporations – but only flows in a decentred network, then there are also no hierarchies of domination (see Barker 2000, 117). Clearly, this leaves much to be desired from a theory that is trying to be critical and emancipatory. In cultural globalization theory, the issue of domination has been overridden with “complex and multiform interrelations” (Tomlinson 1999a, 105) which make it hard to see systemic patterns of any kind, other than the vain effort of the nation-states to resist decentred cultural flows. Such conclusions, however, do not have to follow, even if they are tempting in their optimism, provided that other, capitalism-specific patterns of domination and development are taken into account (such as the forms of “new imperialism” discussed by Harvey 2003).

The avoidance of the analysis of economic power in the work of Appadurai and Tomlinson does not occur by chance. It is fully in line with the tenets of their theory. Tomlinson anchors his analysis to the concept of modernity, so that he is in a position to claim that “the significance of consumer culture can only be fully understood in terms of a broad shift in cultural practices from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’” (Tomlinson 1991, 136). Modernity is for him an ambiguous concept but one that needs, together with globalization, to be identified primarily with a particular kind of shift in the experience of time and space (Tomlinson 1999b, 166; 1995, 896). Thereby what “is at stake is [...] the issue of heteronomous control of cultural environments rather than that of the uniformity of experience within these environments” (ibid.). Given the observation



that cultural experiences are not governed by some unifying “capitalist monoculture” (Tomlinson 1999a, 81), the penetration of the commodity form itself in media and culture – together with its political-ideological ramifications – can then be buried deep in the thick generalities of the “complex connectivity” of globalization.

Appadurai’s work also warrants critical consideration in this sense. Among the subjects that he discusses, an intriguing but, alas, deeply confusing one is the issue of consumption and its relationship to “imagination”. At one point, Appadurai (1996, 42) is critical of the idea that consumption has something to do with human agency, since the “images of agency” provided by global advertising “are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser”. That is, consumerist agency is merely an appearance-form that masks the real unequal social relations in which consumers are embedded. Yet in other instances, Appadurai enthuses about the potential opened up by global commodity flows. For example, in an earlier essay on “commodities and the politics of value”, Appadurai (1986) discusses how elites have historically attempted to control consumption, through sumptuary laws, for example. However, he notes that in modern conditions these attempts are made difficult “since commodities constantly spill beyond the boundaries of specific cultures (and thus of specific regimes of value) [and thus] such political control of demand is always threatened with disturbance” (ibid., 57). This view of how global commodity-exchange implies agency – freedom from political control by local or national elites – is developed further in *Modernity at Large*. There, Appadurai notes how there are now powerful attempts to “discipline” imagination so that it becomes attached to “the desire for new bundles of commodities” (Appadurai 1996, 82). In another twist of the tale, however, he claims that the idea that “imagination will be stunted by the forces of commoditization” is still somehow “fundamentally wrong” (ibid., 6).

What kind of argument, if any, can be made on the foundation of such seemingly contradictory statements? Appadurai, it needs to be kept in mind, is claiming that imagination has been democratized compared to previous times. He relates this development explicitly to electronic media. Instead of being consumed as “the opium of the people”, he argues that “the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*” (Appadurai 1996, 7). This applies to anything ranging from watching Rambo movies to listening to speeches made by Islamic leaders (ibid.). The problem is that Appadurai makes no effort to single out the structural conditions which would increase (or decrease) the possibility that such “provoking” of imagination would translate into constructive collective action, which he assumes is happening in any case (see ibid.). It is also highly doubtful to claim that “irony” is by itself tantamount to agency, (see e.g. Bewes 1997; Barfuss 2008). We can side with him in believing that mass-media contents that transcend national space present difficulties for rulers who want to restrict the intrusion of “foreign influences”. But does this imply that the same border-crossing force is generating collective agency against the unjust features of global capitalism?

Appadurai offers very little elaboration on this question. It is evident that he is more concerned with the kind of imaginaries that fly in the face of nation-state



power. However, Appadurai (1996, 7) also points to the “drudgery” of consumption in capitalism and makes a distinction between fantasy and imagination: the former is “individualistic” and escapist, while the latter has genuine political implications. A sympathetic reading of his arguments regarding the agency-enhancing characteristics of electronic media would find them similar to Jameson’s (1996) discussion of mass cultural products – including the most standardized ones – which he treats as having ideological and utopian potentialities simultaneously. Even so, Jameson notes that this dual functionality works in such a way that the utopian longings for a better society usually come forward in a repressed form, since there are powerful social forces which resist their realization (*ibid.*, 138; see also Buck-Morris 1993, 331–332). In his discussion of the media, Appadurai makes no such qualifications, but assumes a close relationship between mass media and collective imagination: the former make possible a “community of sentiment”, that is, “a group that begins to imagine and feel things together” (Appadurai 1996, 8). Without doubt, this happens all the time, in the consumption of mediated sports events, for example. But the further point is that Appadurai also sees mediated imaginaries as the prerequisite for “translocal social action” (*ibid.*), i.e., action that is also politically meaningful and significant.

What this hopeful vision leaves out is the fact that the media regularly serve to create fantasies that do not assist in the rise of collective imagination or action of any kind, apart from consumption and its channelling towards some brands over others. After all, people around the world increasingly experience mediated imaginaries in forms which are tied to “the collective dream[s] of the commodity phantasmagoria”, i.e., fantasies of material possession that are propagated through advertising and myriad types of marketing, and consumed by “atomized individuals” who experience “their membership in the collectivity only in an isolated, alienating sense” (Buck-Morris 1993, 318, 324). In fact, instead of acting as a vehicle of action, media-assisted consumerism can also suppress collective imagination, by acting as a kind of compensatory reality “against the shocks of the real world” that the individual finds threatening (Robins 1994, 467). Appadurai writes of consumerist fantasies as methods of “disciplining imagination” as if they have nothing to do with the material-economic constraints under which the globalization of media has taken place in recent decades, a development which he is then free to equate with increasing agency (especially due to his interest in how global media flows bypass national boundaries).

Thus, I argue, and repeat, that the critical potential of the cultural theory of deterritorialization or hybridization is diminished by its inescapable privileging of an epistemology of border-crossings. This fundamental presupposition gears the analysis made by exponents of the cultural globalization theory towards the celebration of hybrid identities and cultural differences that undermine the power of nationalism and other forms of cultural exclusion. In a learned essay on the political ambivalences of cultural hybridity, Papastergiadis’ (2005, 54) sights remain firmly locked on the “diversification of the flows of cultural traffic” that “have put into question many of the earlier models for understanding the boundaries of culture and the configurations of identity”. How cultural hybridity drives forward “social change” (*ibid.*, 52) in anything other than an identity-political sense is not on his agenda, though he hints to that

effect. He notes briefly the importance of critique of “the commodification of cultural difference” – as it undermines the case for emancipation-through-hybridity – but he demands immediately thereafter that “we should not forget that some of the greatest disasters of the 20th century were orchestrated in the name of nation, ethnicity and religion” (ibid., 51). Indeed we should not, but I am less convinced of the next sentence where he claims “that the logic of capital and the myth of the nation share the *same* dream of cultural unity” (ibid.; my emphasis). As noted above, global capitalism has shown itself, via corporate strategies of production and marketing, to be increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference and hybridity. Of course, we may speak of cultural unity in capitalism in the sense of the ubiquity of the commodity form, but this is still different from the cultural unity of “nationhood”. The former unity requires a different analytical approach from that of hybridity theory.

Wolfgang Fritz Haug offers a useful counter-perspective to hybridity theory. He notes that global cultural industries have become increasingly fluent in capturing audiences with their visual grandeur and their aesthetics of “aesthetics of the hybrid, mixing, diaspora, or creolization” (Hall 1991; quoted in Haug 2005, 38). But these advancements have been channelled towards the intensive promotion of commodity aesthetics and imagery. The postmodern turn in media culture is superficial, from this angle, because the “principal function and rules of commodity aesthetics have not changed: it serves the realization of commodity capital” (ibid.). The media still promote “the beautiful appearance” (ibid., 41) of commodities at the same time when this is no longer considered to be a matter worth critical discussion. What has changed is the fact that the “high-tech mode of production with its satellite-based telecommunications” and digital media has “globalized the range of commodity aesthetics” (ibid., 47). This does not mean the emergence of the kind of “capitalist monoculture” to which cultural globalization theorists refer, so as to assure readers of their theoretical superiority. What they avoid realizing is that capital

“doesn't really care for the use-gestalt of its products but only for their value-gestalt; this is why it can negotiate about cultural representation. The ‘McWorld-culture’ need not be uniform, as Barber [1996] believes. It need not be, because – to invoke Hall once more – ‘differences don't really matter.’ Nothing of all that which capital presents in the Wagnerian audiovisual ‘synthesis of the arts’ (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) of commodity propaganda really matters for capital. The metaphysical nothingness of all possible Gestalts, goods, sentiments or values is Money, the one resource, which represents command over all the resources. People are bound to respond to the colourful apparition of this negativity, because it is their life condition to appropriate through buying.” (Haug 2005, 48)

Tomlinson (1999a, 87) finds worries over global commodification exaggerated, and maintains that in the non-affluent parts of the world, such anxieties are “scarcely significant”. Yet Haug points out that while most of humanity, especially in the South, has been materially excluded from the promises of commodity aesthetics, the lifestyles

associated with them certainly affect the imaginations of the dispossessed as well, conjuring up the possibility of “another world” (ibid., 46). With this, “the meaning of poverty changes; it turns into the presence of an absence. In the exclusion from the consumption of the typical commodities of transnational high-tech capitalism, the poor keep them present as something missing” (ibid., 46–47). Next to such remarks, I argue that cultural globalization theorists have an underdeveloped sense of tragedy: they lack critical concern for the varying social and cultural implications of the globalization of commodity aesthetics.

The dialectics of hybridity, the mixing of local and global cultures, does not offer an exhaustive foundation for critical cultural theory. The theme of multiple identities and differences on which cultural globalization theorists concentrate glosses over “the vertical structures of class” and the “deepened class inequalities, both within and between nations and regions” that have followed in the wake of capitalist globalization (Murdock 2004, 28). The boundaries of class have intensified, even if we acknowledge that cultural boundaries have become more permeable. As to why the issue of class needs to be incorporated into the global analysis of media and culture, we need to note that they determine, by setting limits, the access to both communicative and cultural resources (ibid., 29). Such material factors are important for the development of imagination whose “unleashing” is mediated not only by the presence of electronic media in our cultures, as Appadurai implies, but also by the hierarchies of class. Appadurai is right in making the point that mediated imaginaries are increasingly available for all kinds of people across class lines, and this is a necessary corrective, for example, to Friedman’s rigidly reductionist position. But class is still key factor in media production and consumption: it determines (again, in the sense mentioned above) the questions of what is being offered to whom, who consumes what and how, and with what kind of general societal consequences. Because Appadurai sidesteps these questions in his examination of media and communications, we can see traces of technological progressivism in his cultural analysis – in other words, he assigns too much causal power to the development of media technologies alone.

A much better effort to link hybrid cultural imaginations to critical cultural theory is offered by Kraidy (2005), who pays attention to material structures and constraints that delimit hybridity, without reducing it to an “effect of dominance” (ibid., 148). In terms of the media, he is careful to note that there are major variations in the ways in which different media systems of the world allow or disallow cultural difference. Kraidy even goes so far as to argue that a media system that has a strong public service element together “with a variety of local, regional, and national stations” has “the best chance of enhancing political life and public discourse across confessional and other potentially explosive boundaries of affiliation” (ibid., 160). Even if this claim cannot be treated as a universal truth, it registers the need to analyze the links between the media and cultural hybridity in conjunction with the state and market forces, and especially the historical development of how these interrelationships between the media, the state and the market have unfolded in different contexts. The deterritorializing effect of media and communications is different, in terms of how it increases possibilities for collective

human agency, in countries that have an authoritarian past, compared to those that are founded on liberal-democratic or social-democratic visions.

The smooth vocabulary of flows, “scapes”, chaos, connectivity, mobilities, (etc.), is insensitive to this differential dynamic of media globalization. We can argue that the strongest examples of how new forms of imagination have opened up, because of globalizing media market, can be found in authoritarian countries that have a history of extreme forms of censorship, such as in Latin America and in parts of Asia (Boyd-Barrett 1998, 159; McChesney 1999, 100). As the case of China testifies, however, there is no necessary link between the expansion of global capitalism and media freedom in state-regulated countries. China’s integration with global capitalism has produced highly paradoxical results, as it has been shaped by the interplay of “bureaucratic capitalists of a reformed Party state, transnational corporate capital, and an emerging urban middle class” (Zhao 2003, 53). That the commercialization of Chinese media has effected certain large-scale cultural changes is obvious. An important instance of this is the increasing acceptance of consumerist values among the country’s population (Paek and Pan 2004). At the present time, these changes have been occurring in the framework of expanding market ideology and continuing state control, rather than in a framework of inspiring new social imaginaries. As a result, freedom of expression has largely shrunk into the “freedom of commercial speech” (Zhao 2003, 57; see Mattelart 2000, 43). The situation is very different in countries with less authoritarian traditions, such as in Scandinavia, where, I would argue, the problem of how to connect the media to the invigoration of collective imagination today is not associated with the need to get rid of excessive state control or nationalism, but much more with the need to re-politicize the economy, which has proven to be difficult because of the unrelenting neoliberal hegemony in public and private life.

A general observation, then, that we can offer as a counterbalance to cultural globalization theory, taken from a different discussion, is that “it is almost impossible to separate the impacts of a medium from the effects of the particular way in which that medium has been institutionalized in a particular society” (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1995, 37). Without such a structural starting point, the way is cleared for uncritical observations that equate capitalist globalization squarely with “growing awareness of cultural difference”, “creative clash”, “subversion” and “diversity” (Nederveen Pieterse 2004, 52–58, *passim*). Cultural globalization theorists stave off political economy with a double move: they associate the analysis of economic power with economic determinism and the issue of state power is found to be redundant on the basis of the claim that the nation-state is withering away. Thus both issues have been made unworthy of serious theoretical engagement, and a poststructuralist cultural determinism which drives their analysis, seasoned with technology-centred arguments, can proceed unchallenged.

### The Persistence of Imperialism

We can now move from the issue of deterritorialization and hybridity to the evaluation of the critique of cultural imperialism. Appadurai and Tomlinson argue that the concept and theory of cultural imperialism is weak especially because cultures and media flows are now fundamentally decentred. In his earlier discussion of cultural imperialism, Tomlinson (1991, 175) states that

“Globalisation may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is a far less coherent or culturally directed process. For all that it is ambiguous between economic and political sense, the idea of imperialism contains, at least, the notion of a purposeful project: the intended spread of a social system from one center of power across the globe. The idea of ‘globalisation’ suggests interconnection and interdependency of all global areas which happens in a far less purposeful way.”

In light of the way in which the notion of cultural imperialism has been criticized, it is obvious that the observation concerning the “interdependency” (as against dependency) “of all global areas” is not to be dismissed lightly. While cultural imperialism theory has been called into question mostly by those who argue against it from either a culturalist or a poststructuralist cultural studies position, critical political economists of the media have also acknowledged its weaknesses, at least in the way in which the theory was originally formulated (see my review of this theme in section 3.3). However, there is no pressing reason to discard the concept of cultural imperialism, since there are still palpable “structures of inequality and oppression”, based on class, geography and language skills, which either prevent or make it harder for millions of people to participate in and benefit from the global media sphere (Sparks 1998, 121–122). This fact, it should be recalled, is acknowledged by Tomlinson as well. Yet he maintains that at the end of the day, the concept has little value in making sense of current global media-cultural phenomena (Tomlinson 1997, 188).

What are we to make of these puzzling clashes of argument? We seem to be dealing with an aporia: both the notions of cultural globalization and cultural imperialism seem to be accurate in some respects, but deficient in others. Thus the credibility of the theories associated with these concepts seem to be based fundamentally on how much weight one gives to the continuities of inequality in world-wide cultural and material relations versus the complexities of current global cultural flows. From such an angle, it is not possible to decide which one is more accurate, as “both positions are convincing within their own terms but do not seem precisely to engage” (Tomlinson 1999b, 171).

A more positive evaluation of this situation would find it to be less of an impasse. Since exponents of both positions are aware of each other’s arguments, this makes them both more informed, in a kind of recursive corrective process. From a historical perspective, it can be argued that the critique of the theory of cultural imperialism went too far in the 1980s and 1990s. This has necessitated another round of reconsideration and reinstatement of that theory in the new millennium, even when its limits are taken

into account. It is evident that Appadurai's (1996, 31) claim, according to which the United States "is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes", is an understatement. World television and film markets are still dominated by US producers, the latter even more so today (Flew 2007, 127; Sparks 2007, 176). The deregulation of global broadcasting market has been good news for US television and film companies: their exports increased by nine times between 1985 and 2001, as new foreign commercial channels strove to keep up with rising demand (Jin 2007, 191). Even as peripheral media production and export has gained momentum in the past decades, the US media industries continue to benefit from their large domestic market where the costs of production can be recouped. This gives them a position from which to flood the world's media market with their products at a level that is impossible for rivals to attain. While there are now "regional versions of *Blind Date* or *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* all over the world [...] they are all modelled, in the first instance, on Anglo-American formats" (Morley 2006, 36). One of the problems of culturalist or radically poststructuralist critiques of cultural imperialism is that there is no criteria by which the critics, because of the assumptions that guide their analysis, could find such media formats as examples of cultural homogeneity: there is always some local, national or regional variation in the glocalization of media products and thus even the most minute local modifications count as examples of cultural complexity, diversity and hybridization.<sup>5</sup> All in all, the cultural criticisms of cultural imperialism theory would stand on firmer ground if the limits to the increasing multi-centredness or decentredness of global media sphere were to receive more attention in them. This task has fallen to media researchers who are more attuned to critical political economic viewpoints (e.g. Sparks 2007).

However, none of this really resolves anything. It needs to be recalled here that cultural globalization researchers are motivated by the question of whether the world is becoming more culturally diverse or more uniform. When the question is posed in such generalized way, as is commonly done, it is easy to find examples of both cultural homogenization and heterogenization, depending where one looks. On the one hand, cultural globalization theorists can make the case that the global media sphere is today

5 Not surprisingly, format shows like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* have been singled out by exponents of cultural studies as a further example of cultural difference. Hill and Palmer (2002, 251) argue that "what makes the format such a creative business proposition is that it has been imported into countries where their own national characteristics can be revealed". It is of course hard to argue, in any absolute sense, against the idea that cultural idiosyncrasies are always at play in media production, but here the culturalist argument goes beyond reasonable limits. For if this case is yet another instance of cultural variance, what would then count as globalized media content that is maximally devoid of local traits? As Waisbord (2004, 381) points out against such culturalist myopia, "format television does not eradicate national cultures, but as a reflection of a global industry solely concerned with quick commercial success and no patience for innovation, it decreases opportunities for diverse and complex representations". In other words, what needs to be asked is the question of whether well-known television formats – which are an industry standard globally – really are media texts that encourage such diversity or not. Cultural pluralists might counter this by claiming that since, for instance, *Big Brother* is based on interactivity among the audiences, it can serve as a platform for playful imagination that can touch a variety of issues which are all connected to local understandings and whose meanings are at least partly unforeseen by the producers. But this opportunity is diminished drastically by the predetermined structure of reality shows, which encourage identifications with materialist values or mimic the general logic of neoliberal competitiveness by testing the mental and corporeal limits of contestants, always ending in the "elimination" of this or that subject (as is typical for reality television world-wide).

less Western than it used to be, both because of the rise of new regional centres of media production and because of the intensified intermingling of cultures everywhere. From that perspective, it is false to claim there is a “strictly” one-way “flow of cultural ideas and products [...] from the West to the Third World” that results in the “suffocation of non-Western cultures” (Sardar 1998, 22). On the other hand, cultural globalization theorists cannot deny the ubiquity of Western (mainly American) celebrities, sneakers, soda drinks, reality shows, supermarkets or theme parks. Even if such formats, brands and products are always subject to the powers of hybridization, we can point to truly clear cases of cultural homogenization, such as the vanishing of thousands of “moribund” or “endangered” languages that is taking place “at a remarkable rate”, a notable reason for which is the spread of English as the global *lingua franca*, through education and the internet, for example (Barton 2007, 202–204). This is hardly an example of the proliferation of cultural identities to which Tomlinson refers. On the basis of such contending examples, it is tempting to end up noting that cultural globalization is precisely that which its prime theorists claim it to be: a complex and unpredictable process guided by “the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference” (Appadurai 1996, 43).

I find this position too modest and analytically undemanding. The mere acknowledgement that the global cultural sphere exhibits opposing tendencies does not reveal much about the theoretical underpinnings on which it is based. Different theoretical positions result in different ideas of what cultural homogenization or heterogenization means, in the first place, and this is crucial for our assessment of the debate over cultural imperialism. To put it briefly, I think that cultural globalization theorists have concentrated too much on the term “cultural”, whereas the implications of the other term, “imperialism”, have eluded them. This is all very understandable, politically speaking, since the notion of imperialism is tarnished through its associations with the empty rhetoric of state socialism. Such political correctness, however, gets in the way of critical understanding. The theories that underlie the concept of imperialism are still important: they refer to processes that are noteworthy in terms of the media and culture, but for which “cultural globalization”, “complex connectivity” or “global cultural flows” are hollow designations.

The main strategy through which Tomlinson and Appadurai undermine “cultural imperialism” is, again, a specific kind of cultural-spatial reduction. According to that reasoning, the theses of cultural imperialism fall down because a) they assume a division of the world into centres and peripheries, dominated by the West; and b) this assessment no longer holds water because of deterritorialization, disjunctural cultural flows, hybridization, or some other concept that they find to be more accurate. It is in this sense that Tomlinson (1991, 175) writes critically of imperialism as the “spread of a social system from one center of power across the globe”, a notion that, he suggests, needs to be replaced with “an image of a decentred network” (Tomlinson 1997, 185).<sup>6</sup> Here Tomlinson touches a crucial theoretical issue, namely, the status of theories

<sup>6</sup> Tomlinson’s work in the 1990s is characterized by a move from an ambivalent discussion of the merits of “cultural imperialism” to a more unequivocal position, where this concept is discarded in favour of “globalization”, “deterritorialization” and other concepts which suggest “complex connectivity”. Even though I am critical of certain formulations of his book-length study of cultural imperialism debates (Tomlinson 1991), I find it, by and large, a useful analysis of the different aspects of that subject.



of imperialism in general. Unfortunately, he does not expand on this issue. In order to fix this shortcoming, I will provide a short outline of how theories of imperialism have developed, as this will help us to understand better the more particular notion of cultural or media imperialism as well.

Political economists of the media who devised the theory of cultural imperialism in its original form, such as Schiller (see especially 1969, 1–19), were clearly influenced by classical Marxist (in this case, Leninist) theories of imperialism. Lenin (see e.g. Kiely 2005, 59; Callinicos 2002, 252) stressed the expansive nature of capitalism, that is, its compulsive search for resources and markets. This “law of motion” forced powerful nations to compete with each other and to seek to spread their field of influence beyond nation-state borders. This was, in his explanation, the main undercurrent of the events that lead up to the First World War. However, in the historical context following the Second World War, the United States emerged as the leading capitalist hegemon, and this seemed to take steam out of the argument that rivalries between major capitalist powers are still the order of the day. This shift was reflected in new theories of “US super-imperialism” in the 1960s and 1970s, which highlighted the military and economic power of the United States (Kiely 2005, 60–61). It was claimed that the US took the role of organizing and policing global capitalism in the face of the “threat” posed by state socialist countries. At the same time, this role fitted well with its attempts “to control the sources of raw materials and to secure the widest opportunities for the export of American capital and commodities” (Callinicos 2002, 255). It was in this sense that Schiller (1991, 14) claimed that “media-cultural imperialism is a subset of the *general* system of imperialism”: it assists in the securing of the opportunities mentioned above (through advertising and the establishment of commercial media systems, for example). At the time, US super-imperialism was associated strongly with “dependency” and “underdevelopment” in the peripheries, in other words, their military, economic and cultural subjugation by the United States, in particular. This theme found much resonance in Latin America, for example, and as McGuigan (2006, 96) observes, while the theory of media or cultural imperialism is largely discredited in the West, it “remains an argument of critical credibility for the Rest”.

In retrospect, it is ironic that theories of US-led super-imperialism, including the first round of theories of media-cultural imperialism, flourished precisely at a time when the engines of the hegemon had already started to cough. According to Wallerstein (2006), the period since 1970 has been marked by the decline of American power. The signs of this decline have been manifold. The long post-war economic boom (in the US, but also elsewhere) came to an end in the early 1970s; simultaneously, the US faced stiffening competition from Western Europe and Japan; in addition, its wars in Indo-China were becoming too costly, which further undermined its status as the unquestioned world leader (in addition to military defeat in Vietnam in 1975) (Brenner 1998; Callinicos 2002, 255). The post-2001 conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are not examples of a new powerful America, but symptoms of a desperate empire (Wallerstein 2006). Thus we can understand why the neo-conservative leaders under George W. Bush were so enthralled by the idea of how its downfall can be reversed through strong leadership or “macho aggressive unilateralism” that sends a message not only to “rogue states” but



also to its allies, so that they would not try to pursue geopolitical strategies independent of the United States (ibid., 10). The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, proved to be calamitous on economic, political and military fronts. Together with enormous budget deficits and the hidden costs created by the Iraq debacle (Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008), the American economy has been slowing down since the high tech boom of the late 1990s; on top of this, it entered into recession in 2007 as its long-looming housing bubble finally burst, causing huge credit-based losses, pushing pressures on consumer spending and driving down its GDP (Blackburn 2008). Thus a peaceful and prosperous *Pax Americana* plotted by neo-conservatives has not come to pass. With the new Obama presidency, there are signs that the US government aims to return to a policy and rhetoric of “softer” multilateralism, on which is less devisive in terms of the interests of global capitalism as a whole. It is, of course, uncertain whether any actual multilateralism is possible in the current historical period (Wallerstein 2004), and in terms of economic developments, it is highly doubtful whether the American economy is going to recover from its structural crises (Brenner 2004).

On the basis of this outline, we can say that Tomlinson has grounds to claim that imperialism in the sense of American or Western dominance is a difficult proposition. However, this does not necessarily mean that imperialism is an empty analytic category, for it is not necessary to reduce the question of imperialism to battles between great powers or unilateral US dominance. There are other kinds of theories of imperialism which bring forward the integrative nature of global capitalism, based in particular on Karl Kautsky’s notion of “ultra-imperialism” (e.g. Kiely 2005, 62–63; Callinicos 2002, 250–251).<sup>7</sup> Such a theory holds that global capitalism is organized on the basis of transnational (rather than national) class interest. It leads to very different emphases compared to the theories of inter-imperial rivalry or US hegemony:

“Recent U.S. policies such as the imposition of neo-liberal structural adjustment programs and sponsorship of free trade agreements have served to further pry open regions and sectors around world to global capitalism, to transnational capital. The IMF and other transnational state agencies have not acted as simple instruments of ‘U.S.’ imperialism. I know of no single IMF structural adjustment program that creates conditions in intervened country that favors ‘U.S.’ capital in any special way, rather than opening up the intervened country, its labor and resources, to capitalists from any corner of world. [...] The U.S. state has attempted to play a leadership role on behalf of transnational capitalist interests.” (Robinson 2007)

This argument is related to mainstream globalization theory in that it does not assume a firm nation-state or inter-state framework. Yet, it differs crucially from the claim that “globalization” does now all the analytical work that “imperialism” was responsible for earlier. From this perspective, imperialism refers today to the

<sup>7</sup> For reasons stated below, I do not advocate “ultra-imperialism” as the most advanced theory of imperialism, however. It is only that I find it necessary to discuss it here so as to develop an understanding of imperialism, and its cultural implications, that is different from that which is usually offered by cultural globalization theorists.

expansion of capitalism that is occurring in tandem with the development of a less Western-dominated world, both economically and culturally. What this also means is that new transnational inequalities emerge that do not necessarily follow familiar North-South divisions. Neoliberalism is the form that imperialism takes in the current historical conjuncture, but it will not automatically lead to underdevelopment outside the former core, since India and Brazil, for instance, now boast rising middle classes that participate in the global consumer market (in addition to exporting their cultural products far and wide).

Tomlinson seems, then, to have good reasons to claim that the world is less firmly centred than before in an economic and cultural sense. But he throws the baby out with the bathwater in his embrace of “globalization”, the logic of which he sees as altogether different from “imperialism”. While we do not need to think, together with Tomlinson, that there is now “one center of power” in the world, it still remains the fact that a specific “social system”, built around the capitalist market, is spreading “across the globe”. It constitutes a social system even more so today than before, as the current neoliberal project has succeeded in extending market principles in social relations and different spheres of human life with unprecedented force.

The second key problem in Tomlinson’s argument is the idea that we cannot discern any intended or purposeful project behind world-wide social and economic developments. He (1997, 189) argues with Giddens that globalization is best characterized as a “juggernaut”, a process so complex and chaotic that it does not seem to possess any coherence or centre (see also Appadurai 1996, 47). However, we can argue (see Hesmondhalgh 2008, 96) that there are social groups who benefit mightily from the very intended, systematic and purposeful actions of the IMF, World Bank, US treasury and other neoliberal institutions that serve transnational class interests. The opening up of economies and societies – sometimes even without external pressure or coercion, but usually not – to private finance is sound policy in the eyes of lenders, shareholders, investors, corporate executives and rising middle classes in Asia and elsewhere, but it does not translate into prosperity for all. Cutbacks in public spending, the seizure of public assets, the loosening of social safety nets, rising income inequality, poverty and increases in the rate of exploitation represent the other side of the coin (see the essays collected in Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005). There are more than enough grounds to doubt that neoliberal practices and the so-called Washington consensus have provided better living conditions, economic stability or even economic growth worldwide after the 1980s. As the famous neo-Keynesian economist Paul Krugman (1996) points out, policymakers and experts hold on to free-market doctrines even when their relation to economic growth and other stated positive goals has been proven wrong. Yet doctrinal support for such a dubious “conventional wisdom”, which is based on “powerful but selectively read lessons of experience”, may still hold sway. This is because there is a distinctive element of purpose behind that support, regardless of its intellectual merits and the seemingly chaotic global developments that they have, for a significant measure, triggered: “bad ideas flourish because they are in the interest of powerful groups” (*ibid.*, 729–732, *passim.*).

If imperialism is viewed as a transnational project involving such “universalist” class interests – rather than as the entrenchment of Western hegemony – it makes sense to think the recent globalization of economy, culture and media through the concept of imperialism. It is another question if we have to think it specifically through the concept of “cultural imperialism”, which is associated with a theory of imperialism that is today less convincing. The crux of the matter is that capitalism today may expand geographically without it having to be exclusively in the interests of America or the West. In all parts of the world, the recent decades have been a period in which states have implemented mechanisms, devised and supported by transnational elites, which have intensified the power of the market in social and cultural life. In the field of culture and media, neoliberal capitalist globalization can very well undermine the cultural power of the United States and the West (although it does not necessarily imply that). It allows many centres and hybrid interdependencies, but it channels this complex cultural connectivity within capitalist dynamics – through increasing commodification, corporatization and privatization. Dan Schiller (1996, 90) puts it well in his argument against Liebes’s and Katz’s (1990) famous refutation of cultural imperialism theory: “It is not *Dallas* per se that was ‘an imperialist imposition,’ [...] but the system of social relationships in which the program was embedded, and within which the responses to the program, in any truly critical method, themselves also have to be situated”. What was being exported, if you like, was not as much “America” or “the West” but a specific kind of social system, guided by the logic of the market and its culture of commodity aesthetics. The problem with the concept of imperialism may be extra-intellectual rather than analytic: its user is susceptible, to borrow a phrase, to fail in “a litmus test of one’s suitability to be taken seriously” (Krugman 1996, 725) in front of the conventional wisdoms of academic globalization theory. If this is the case, it is just as well to speak of the same developments as “capitalist globalization”, which has a distinctive media-cultural aspect. In any case, theories of “cultural globalization” or simply “globalization” do not evoke the strengthening of social inequalities and the purposeful neoliberal class project that underlies this, mired as they are in the morass of complexities, disjunctures and difference.

It is interesting, though, that Tomlinson, as opposed to Appadurai, has written of the possibility that media or cultural imperialism can be viewed from the perspective of capitalist globalization. But it comes forward only in a veiled form, as part of his general theory of “modernity”. In *Cultural Imperialism*, Tomlinson (1991, 168) notes that “we can speak of a ‘culture’ of capitalism” in the wide sense “as one of the key autonomized institutions of modernity [that] represents it as something within which the routine practices both of ordinary people and of individual capitalist organizations are locked”. The argument here is that the critique of “cultural imperialism” should not be associated with the claim that America or multinational corporations can be singled out as the guilty parties. Instead, the blame should be placed on “a *situation*” that has developed over time and for which “no *present* agent is ‘responsible’ in any full sense” (ibid., 169).

This position has its merits, but it results ultimately in a disabling indeterminacy. In such a formulation, capitalism and imperialism are re-coded as “modernity”. When that

happens, the emancipatory possibilities of critical discourses of imperialism become defused and the issue of domination evaporates into the air. To think of imperialism in a critical sense means the same as to call into question the social determinations unique to the capitalist mode of production in its current historical forms. However, if these determinations are just parts of “complex multiple determinations” of modernity (Tomlinson 1991, 169), then there is no pressing need to place them under scrutiny. It seems that there are only two options open for Tomlinson: either we have a theory of cultural imperialism or imperialism that reduces it to the question of Western dominance, or we equate it with modernity in a highly general sense. An interesting paradox occurs due to this strategy: when he criticizes theories of cultural imperialism for their Western-centredness, he supports this critique from a similarly Western-centred point of view, i.e., by showing that Western power is no longer what it used to be. This is a choice that Tomlinson makes, and like all theorists who want to display argumentative consistency, he has to live with the consequences. His position cancels critical interpretations of “imperialism”, in the sense that he opts for a critique of theories of cultural imperialism that does not distinguish between different possible interpretations of the latter concept. He takes the Leninist heritage of imperialism theory as a given (imperialism as the interstate struggle between Western powers which resulted to the post-war hegemony of the US); after he has found that line of inquiry to be problematic, he does not pursue an alternative theory of imperialism that is less “realistic” but capitalism-specific nonetheless.

In *Globalization and Culture*, Tomlinson returns to this issue, which represents a conundrum not merely in his work but in cultural globalization theory at large. He acknowledges that despite cultural variations and material inequalities, the commodification of culture “represents a distinct narrowing and convergence of cultural experience” (Tomlinson 1999a, 87). After that, he adds that there are still many cultural experiences and practices that have not been “colonized by a commodifying logic”, like personal relationships, religion, national identity, sexual orientation or traditions (ibid., 88). This argument is somewhat lacking, as all of these aspects have been subject to extensive commodification (see e.g. Mills 1956; Dines et al. 1998; Miller 2005). Yet it is true, of course, that there are aspects of human life – spontaneity, creativity, altruistic caring, ethical choices, etc. – that resist that logic. This is clearly a source for hope, as Tomlinson rightly notes, but what is it that is substantive here? From a critical perspective, which is more important: the fact that there is a trend towards the commodification of everything, or the fact that this will not lead to a totally commodified world? The whole point in criticizing commodification, as far as I can see, is not in evoking some totalistic “capitalist monoculture” dominated mainly by American brands, but in the instrumentalist demands and constraints that manifest themselves against what Tomlinson (1999a, 19) calls “meanings as ends in themselves”. If what we have now is the extension of the instrumentalist logic of the market in all areas of human life globally – which Tomlinson acknowledges is occurring in the cultural sphere as well – and if this can be interpreted as one form of imperialism, then the claim that not “all cultural diversity is likely to collapse” (ibid., 88) does not constitute a refutation of such theorization; rather, it seems more like a footnote to it.

Even though, in the above, I have defended the relevance of “imperialism” as a critical category through references to transnational class interests and neoliberal practices, I do not think that Kautsky’s theory of “ultra-imperialism” constitutes the best approach to such matters. The problem with the theory of ultra-imperialism is that it does not register “the persistence of geopolitical competition”, which “denotes all conflicts over security, territory, resources and influence among states” (Callinicos 2007, 537, 538). Instead of arguing, as contemporary heirs of Kautsky do, that we have arrived in a world where conflicts and contradictions between capitalist states, on one hand, and capitalism and the state system, on the other, have become obsolete, I think it is better to notice the simultaneous existence of “territorial” and “capitalist” imperialism (Harvey 2003). While recent decades have been a period of extensive “capitalist imperialism”, that is, the introduction of neoliberal political measures that make the world safe for capital (“structural adjustment”, privatization, the concentration of transnational corporate power and the spread of the culture of consumerism, etc.), this has not made nation-states and geopolitical competition redundant. It is true that it is difficult for nation-state institutions and elites to act in ways which clash with transnational class interests – in fact, there are reasons to believe that in many cases they are not even attempting to do so (see Sklair 2002, 98–105). However, it is an exaggeration to claim that the “passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty”, so that “in contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers” and that it is “a *decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt and Negri 2000, xii). It is equally false to claim that nation-states are now “merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, monies, and populations” (ibid., 31), whereas power is now located solely on the ubiquitous market and the detrterritorialized biopolitical production of life through high-tech machines (ibid., 27–41).

This view gets carried away with its neo-vitalistic metaphysics. Empire cannot function without nation-state powers. There is now an “Empire of capital”, based on the worldwide spread of market imperatives, which is, however, dependent upon “a system of multiple states” (Wood 2003, 14). This is so because the economic imperatives of capitalism require a certain amount of “extra-economic” protection: the mechanisms of regulation and coercion by nation-states “to create and sustain conditions of accumulation and maintain the system of capitalist property” (Wood 2002, 178). Market forces cannot by themselves provide legal and political authority that would guarantee necessary levels of stability, infrastructure, social welfare and legitimation, or which would control the mobility of the propertyless and their reliance on wage labour for survival (ibid., 178–179; Wood 2003, 18–19). Nation-states are responsible for such political functions, which are complementary to the economic functions of the market; no form of “global governance” is arising on the horizon that would be able to take over these manifold tasks (ibid., 20).

I am in full agreement with Wood (2002, 177) that globalization “is characterized less by the decline of the nation-state than by a growing contradiction between the global scope of capital and its persistent need for more local and national forms of

‘extra-economic’ support”. This perspective is congruent with the view that political-ideological superstructures of the state are relatively autonomous of the economic base, a view developed by Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulanzas in the 1960s and 1970s (Callinicos 2002, 257). This view helps us to understand the contradictions that have been played out in the global political arena in the 2000s. Specifically, it helps us to account for the unsettling ways in which the United States has tried to act as the enforcer of global capitalism after 2001. For Hardt and Negri (2000, 180), the United States is a “world police” that “acts not in imperialist interest but in imperial interest”, even “in the name of global right”. Again, there is truth to this view, since the US military has executed interventions against “rogue states” to open up their economies and resources, especially oil, to transnational capital. However, the situation is more complicated, as has become painfully obvious after the publication of Hardt and Negri’s best-seller. The synchronization of the contradictions between the global capitalist economy and its extra-economic support is a delicate matter. Much of the distaste expressed by many leading Western European politicians and political commentators against what they perceived as excessive critique of the United States during George W. Bush’s administration was explainable by the incapability of the US government to represent transnational interests in ways that the majorities could accept as legitimate. In general, the so-called Empire is less “smooth” and more crisis-ridden than what Hardt and Negri lead us to believe. As in the past, we are today “confronted with a hybrid form a sovereignty, in which appeals to universal principles coexist in complex ways with assertions of national interest” (Callinicos 2002, 262). This contradiction is likely to continue despite the outcomes of national presidential and parliamentary elections.

The recognition of contradictions in current imperialistic projects is vital for the analysis of global media and communications. The privatization and commodification of media, and the service performed by American, German, Indian, Chinese or Brazilian media companies as “missionaries of global capitalism” (Herman and McChesney 1997) is a major part of the picture. But it has to be complemented with the realization that there are historically based variances in how the market and the state have influenced the development of media systems in different national contexts. These findings can be surprising, such as in cases of cultural protectionism that, while always problematic, can sometimes be “necessary and wise” or even supportive of cultural hybridization (see Morley 2006, 38). Furthermore, there are interesting examples in very recent history of how worldwide media developments have been affected by the assertion of national interest on the part of the United States, the former culprit of “cultural imperialism”. For example, the decisions of the US military to bomb the offices of Al-Jazeera in Kabul in Baghdad, and the frequent criticisms of this channel voiced by the US government cannot be explained away simply as episodes of its “civilizing” mission on the behalf of

global capital.<sup>8</sup> The promotion of “independent media” in Iraq after 2003 by the United States is also instructive in this sense. The neoconservatives of the Bush administration instigated US-friendly psychological warfare and propaganda operations (both overt and covert) and the funnelling of money to market-friendly media outlets (Barker 2008, 119–124) – with results that have been less than spectacular insofar as stability and democratization is concerned (Battle 2007). These media-related cases are not offered here as important in themselves; instead, I conceive of them as shades of the imperialism in the twenty-first century, with which cultural globalization theory is particularly ill-equipped to deal, or even to recognize. Fortunately, the analysis of such issues, which are hardly insignificant when put together, is made possible by using other theoretical resources. The analysis of interlinkages between media, culture and imperialism is not over in times of extensive globalization.

#### The Poverty of Postmodern Cosmopolitanism

Finally, we come to the issue of cosmopolitanism. As I remarked in the review section, this theme takes two forms in academic globalization discussions: either it signifies a political theory of global governance or a cultural theory of cosmopolitan identity. In both of these perspectives, the multiplicity of global connections and weakening of the nation-state is assumed. As a representative of the first type of cosmopolitan theory, Held (2002b, 5ff) argues that the cultural, political and institutional roots of the nation-state are undermined by several forces, among them the diversity of information and communication flows, the co-existence of political loyalties for different communities at the same time, the impact of world markets and transnational economic flows and the rise of supranational organizations. On the basis of such analysis, the advocates of global governance are concerned with political and legal mechanisms and structures that would establish a cosmopolitan democracy on the ruins of the declining nation-state. The second line of cosmopolitanism, which can be called postmodern cosmopolitanism, emphasizes cultural difference, hybridity and multiple attachments. It challenges the advocates of global governance, rooted as their thinking is in modern theories of universal cosmopolitanism, to think the issue through the “diverse historical and spatial contexts” that frame the project of cosmopolitanism today (James 2006, 297). Held (2002b, 12) acknowledges that “the capacity to mediate between national cultures, communities of fate and alternative styles of life” – the ability to “reason from the point of view of others” – is essential in the global age. In contrast to Held, however, both Appadurai and Tomlinson do not see much hope in anchoring such a perspective to a political project of cosmopolitanism; for them, cosmopolitanism is a cultural matter.

8 Al Jazeera, which broadcasts in Arabic and English, has tens of millions viewers across the world. It is secular rather than religious – which has infuriated a number of authoritarian leaders in Arabic countries – and its Western-style coverage, while very critical of the US, cannot be characterized as anti-business. Al-Jazeera advertises, although it cannot support its operations on that basis (for various reasons, including boycotts instigated by Saudi Arabia), and it airs stock market news and business reports like any channel with strong, in this case global, economic aspirations. See El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2003; Miles 2005.



While postmodern cosmopolitanism is more important for my assessment of cultural globalization theory, I first want to make some brief comments on the theory of cosmopolitan governance. From a critical perspective, it is crucial to understand what kind of political vision the advocates of “global governance” are proposing. The key point here is that many recent theories of cosmopolitanism and globalization have strong connections to the tradition of social democracy. For one group of social democratic thinkers, exemplified by Anthony Giddens and his advocacy of the “Third Way”, globalization is largely an irresistible process; political initiatives that would diverge from neoliberal assumptions, such as “fiscal responsibility” or reinstatement of Keynesian-style economic management, will be severely punished (see Loyal 2003, 147ff; Smith 2003, 3–4). Due to this, “social democrats must be content to lessen somewhat the social costs associated with neoliberal policies” (ibid., 4). Yet there is another group of social democratic theorists who are not happy with such defeatism. They agree that globalization has indeed undermined social-democratic policies on the national level, but that they can now be pursued on the global level. This requires the institutionalization of a “cosmopolitan democratic law” through international courts, independent global military forces and regional parliaments, among other things (Held 1995, 271ff).

Smith (2003, 6) notes that most debates regarding the institutionalization of cosmopolitanism revolve around the feasibility of such political structures. In contrast to this – and to liberalist thinking at large – Held highlights the importance of not only democracy but also the market, which can not be left to its own vagaries. He (1995, 248) claims that “distributional questions and matters of social justice” have to be incorporated into visions of cosmopolitan democracy. In other words, exclusively political democracy is not enough; it has to be complemented with the institutionalization of economic justice and the right to control markets via public bodies. This entails, for example, the right to basic income, controls on capital transactions and legally binding sanctions on corporations that fail to respect the precepts of global democracy (ibid., 249–259).

According to Held, then, the injustice brought on the world by neoliberalism necessitates a series of political and economic reforms. This is what separates him from the acceptance of current conventional wisdom of Western European right wing social democrats. I think – together with Smith (2003, 8) – that in this Held is “vastly superior” to them. As a defender of global governance, Held is of the opinion that capitalism allows itself to be transformed in ways that are substantially democratic and just: the ugly mask of neoliberalism can be torn off and be replaced with capitalism with a human face, so to speak. This theme is, of course, at the heart of the debate between social democrats and revolutionary Marxists. The latter are united in arguing that “capital’s incurably iniquitous system is *structurally incompatible* with *universality* in any meaningful sense of the term” (Mészáros 2001, 10). Held admits that the current phase of capitalism is ridden with iniquitousness, but he seeks a transformation of that system on reformist grounds rather than by arguing for a different alternative, an alternative that would attempt to get rid of capitalist property rights and social relations altogether (see Held 1995, 249; Smith 2003, 8).

While I am not going to address the political theory of global governance further here, the preceding remarks help me to establish a critical point regarding Appadurai's and Tomlinson's postmodern cosmopolitanism. I maintain that in the absence of any notion of large-scale institutional reforms that feature prominently in Held's work, their postmodern cosmopolitanism comes across as paper-thin. This is the general impression especially because their yearning for cosmopolitanism appears as an emphatic political creed that concludes their media-cultural globalization analyses. However, it is a truncated vision: Appadurai's and Tomlinson's cosmopolitanism is purely a matter of changing consciousness and the political opportunities to which it points to are opportunities only in relation to the assumed decline of the nation-state. As a consequence, their discussion of cosmopolitanism or postnationalism has very little to say about the global capitalist market. What they are arguing against is the nation-state, defined as the prison-house of totalitarian identity (see Appadurai 1996, 177). Cosmopolitanism is for them a "cultural disposition" (Tomlinson 1999a, 199) that refers to the cornucopia of different identity positions that globalization is making available, with the help of which we are becoming aware of many cultural "others" regardless of the artificial boundaries of nations.

There is no need to be ignorant of the emancipation that the opening up of different cultural worlds represents, as opposed to the destructiveness of restrictive national identities. That destructiveness has indeed been a crucial, although by no means the only (see Waller 2002), psychological source of conflict in the modern era. However, since the postmodern cosmopolitanism of Appadurai and Tomlinson operates with a dualism that recognizes only the bad boundary-thinking of the nation-state and the good cultural difference of globalization, no room is made for universalism in their work. What their viewpoint misses is the realization that not only the nation-state but also the social and political order of capitalism, especially in the context of ongoing neoliberal hegemony, is based on structures of exclusion of the other – in the latter case, on material rather than cultural structures. Tomlinson (1999a, 194) is keen to embrace the cosmopolitan world in which "there are no others" and where the worth of every human being is respected, in principle. However, he does this from within a perspective that dismisses "any universal human interests" (*ibid.*, 193). Thus, a serious engagement with human universalism, insofar as material relations between different groups of people are concerned, is precluded by him. Yet those unjust relations – which are highly significant reasons for why the worth of every human is not respected in practice – cannot be corrected through the discourse of cultural pluralism alone (Tomlinson 1999a, 193–200), but through the pursuit of principles and rights that are common to all people, regardless of cultural differences. Postmodern cosmopolitanism dooms us eternally to "dialogue" concerning cultural difference, without the possibility of even temporary resolution. Naturally, there is nothing wrong with "dialogue" as such, but when postmodern cultural globalization theorists claim that it can never be conducted on the basis of universal interests, the scope of their social criticism is seriously restricted (see Callinicos 1999, 311–312).

Given the inherent limitations of Appadurai's and Tomlinson's vision, what kind of role can media and communications occupy in their postmodern cosmopolitanism? As

can be guessed on the basis of the preceding review and remarks, their comments on the subject are very cautious. Their conclusion is typically that media and communications offer “possibilities” for cosmopolitanism. Even this claim, however, is heavily qualified by the authors (see Tomlinson 1999a, 202–204; Appadurai 1996, 8, 21–23, 194). Because of their guarded argumentative style, it is sometimes difficult to see what kind of substantive proposition they are actually making. However, as we have seen, Appadurai and Tomlinson present the media and communications mainly as positive forces that assist in the realization some kind of postnational or cosmopolitan vision. The critical point regarding Appadurai is, as I noted earlier, that he accords too much power to electronic media, as technological forces, in “unleashing” collective imagination in ways that are broadly emancipatory, without considering state and market structures that mediate that process.<sup>9</sup> This optimistic media-centrism is a tendency in Appadurai’s work on cultural globalization, to which he offers some counterbalances (e.g. *ibid.*, 7), but it constitutes a tendency nonetheless. Appadurai’s high reliance on technological arguments is further underscored by his insistence that his theory of globalization is “necessarily a theory of the recent past”, since “it is only in the past two decades or so that media and migration have become so massively globalized, that is to say, active across large and irregular transnational terrains” (*ibid.*, 9).

While I have voiced reservations regarding Appadurai’s technological progressivism, I am also critical of this historical assessment. The problematic nature of the last claim can be disclosed in relation to Tomlinson’s analysis of how media and communication converge with cosmopolitanism. For Tomlinson (1999a, 199–207), the media are consequential in terms of how they produce “awareness of the wider world”, which increases the possibilities of extending human solidarity beyond the local lifeworld. Again, this is a vision that “runs the risk of substituting ethics for politics” (Calhoun 2002, 891–892). However, here I want to examine Tomlinson’s claim on its own grounds: how much trust can we place in electronic media alone as an instruments of extending global solidarity and cosmopolitan ethical practices?

In his article on the psychological motivations behind consumption, Robins (1994) notes that there is a tension between the constant bombardment of the subject by images of violence, death and suffering on television, and the need to “defuse” those anxieties lest they become overwhelming. He (*ibid.*, 459) refers to psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion’s idea that “strategies of evasion and dissimulation are as important in understanding human motivation as is the pursuit of clarity and truth”. What this means, in terms of

9 In a more recent collection of essays, Appadurai (2006) claims to be more alert to what he calls “the darker sides of globalization” and less “cheerful about the benefits of global flows” (*ibid.*, 3). This is true, as he concentrates on such issues as terrorism, “ethnic cleansing” and war in the new collection, without making similarly optimistic claims about the power of mediated imaginations. But there is a basic similarity in his position, where the main distinction is drawn between the utopian “cellularity” of transnational movements and the modern nation-state, which is built on the exclusive national identity and intolerance of difference (*ibid.*, 3, 13–137). He notes the importance of finding a “third space” of social organization outside not only the state but also the market (*ibid.*, 132), but this is clearly subordinate to his discussion of the ways in which nation-states try to maintain “ethnic purity” (*ibid.*, 4). Appadurai (2001, 5) considers the nation-state as the “greatest” stable structure of society, now in dire peril because of increasing global flows. In contrast, capitalism is not assessed by him as a distinctive social form from a structural viewpoint; it figures as “the predatory mobility of unregulated capital” (*ibid.*, 7), “runaway financial capital” (Appadurai 2006, 23) or suchlike, against which he claims that no “universalist” principles of solidarity can be arranged (*ibid.*, 136).

the willingness of individuals to engage with the larger social world and its disturbing media representations, is that it is (at least) as important to pay attention to the ways in which they seek to insulate themselves from the shock experiences of the media as it is to note the ways in which they engage with them emotionally and actively. Drawing from the work of Buck-Morss (mentioned above) and others, Robins (*ibid.*, 463–466) argues that the act of consumption (of commodities and media entertainment) offers a compensatory reality, an “intoxication of phantasmagoria” that reflects “the desire to create defensive barriers and to avoid or minimize anxiety”.

Tomlinson (1999a, 176–177) counters Robins’ arguments by noting that they reflect “undue moral pessimism”. He argues that there is considerable individual variance in how people react to anxiety-inducing media imagery: for some, they are indeed too much, while others are stirred by them “into campaigns on behalf of distant groups and causes” (Thompson 1995, cited in Tomlinson 1999a, 177). Tomlinson introduces the concept of “relevance structure” to understand the ways in which people relate selectively to distant mediated events; their relevance for self-constitution is predicated on how successfully they associate with the immediate local lifeworlds of modern subjects. Thus comes the final conclusion: the media can open our mental landscapes to the larger world and increase our “awareness” if the media succeeds in its “moral responsibility” to frame its stories in ways that are engaging for the people (*ibid.*, 179). Because of this reasoning, global media spectacles such as Live Aid in the 1980s or the pivotal media event of the 1990s, Princess Diana’s death and funeral, are embodiments of Tomlinson’s postmodern cosmopolitanism in action (see also Urry 2000b).

I think that Tomlinson’s point on individual variations in media reception is correct. I also think that he is warranted to note the analytic importance of how the suffering of distant others is framed by media professionals, for without this it would be hard to understand why some issues become genuine media events, possibly even global media events, instead of remaining something less engaging. However, what I think deserves criticism is the fact that Tomlinson is satisfied with his conclusion that the possibilities of attaining global solidarity are for the most part related to what the media does or does not do. As with Appadurai, there is a high degree of media-centrism in Tomlinson’s analysis as well, despite his best intentions.

In contrast, I argue that the production and selection of how distant events are represented by the media need to be examined against the backcloth of larger social contexts. First, the reason why some events becomes central in the media is not only due to successful framing – the conformity of the event with the so-called news criteria and other “inner” mechanisms of journalistic institutions – but also due to specific economic and political interests. In the US media, for instance, events that can be framed so that they conform to the country’s geopolitical interests have a much better chance of being reported than ones that collide with them. An illuminating case is Turkey: the massacres that its government has been and is responsible for do not receive air-time because of its strategic importance for the USA and the NATO (Cohen 2001, 173). The same can be said about Israel (see Philo and Berry 2004, 252–256). Therefore the possibilities of raising mediated awareness on agonizing issues and the use of the media to “extend solidarity’s short hands” (Tomlinson 1999a, 205) is limited

by forces that are “external” to the media (but which also work their way into the daily production of media images and stories). This limitation is not discussed by Tomlinson.

Second, we need to put into the perspective the cases of media-induced eruptions of global solidarity. The fact of the matter is that even if the media reports, often with considerable moral effectivity, the pain inflicted on distant others, “the sheer dimensions of mass suffering are”, as Cohen (2001, 177) points out in his commentary on the issue, “difficult to grasp, and even more difficult to retain”. The images of suffering beamed to television audiences cultivate global sympathy for given victims, but this positivity is met by the short attention span and selectivity of the media institutions, whereby other events soon take the place of the former and whereby countless other cases never even make it to the anchor’s desk (*ibid.*). Among the results of this is that it is far from being certain that increasing media attention to global events translates into understanding of their complex causes (*ibid.*, 170). From Cohen’s perspective, celebrated global media spectacles of suffering may be seen as necessary illusions which either serve to testify to the capability of society to engage adequately with atrocities or which serve to block from the mind the painful realization that exploitation, torture, famine and murder are the everyday norm rather than the exception. There is a strong element of cultural denial in facing atrocities and suffering, although Cohen views the matter somewhat differently than Robins (see above). For him, it is not so much a question of how the human psyche numbs itself in front of the bombardment of harrowing images of different kinds. There is not much to suggest that denial is based on repetition as such (*ibid.*, 191). In contrast to this, the reason is more structurally based: it is “that any dimming of compassion, any decreased concern about distant others, is just what the individual spirit of the global market wants to encourage. The message is: get real, wise up and toughen up; the lesson is that nothing, nothing after all, can be done about the problems like these or people like this” (*ibid.*, 195). Thus Robins may be partly right: when individuals are confronted with their helplessness, the phantasmagorias of consumerism can be of compensatory value, a reality less threatening. This, I think, is something that should be discussed critically in relation to the analysis of postmodern cosmopolitanism by cultural globalization theorists, especially in light of claims according to which popular consumer culture is the sphere from which “the ethics of the cosmopolitan” might be emerging (see Tomlinson 1999a, 201).

Tomlinson’s and Appadurai’s reluctance to think the above-mentioned structural issues in relation to their cosmopolitanism or post-nationalism is congruent with their optimistic media-technological arguments. It is guarded optimism which has by now a long historical lineage. If we look at the history of ideas regarding technologies of communication, it is most obviously not the case, *pace* Appadurai, that we have only in recent times come to realize that electronic media have lifted us up above the restrictions of nation-states, with the promise that a passage into an exhilarating global existence waits just around the corner. Founding his arguments on cinema, radio, cars and aeroplanes, a Russian aristocratic visionary Count Hermann Keyserling, for instance, wrote in the late 1920s of “globe-trotters” who were no longer tied to the nation and its “narrow inner and outer boundaries”, and that nations no longer had any decisive role to play in the future where “new forms of socialization are arising irresistibly” (Keyserling

1927; cited in Pemberton 2001, 71). Similar sentiments have been very common ever since (and even earlier), as engineers, philosophers, economists, cultural commentators and others have made projections of cosmopolitanism on technological grounds (see *ibid.*, 59–153, *passim.*). A specifically interesting example is economist Robert Brady, who wrote in early 1920s that the rationalization of the world will not lead – beyond the homogeneity of world-wide electronic network structures – to cultural homogeneity but to what is now called global cultural hybridity (*ibid.*, 105–106). The difference with these views in comparison to Appadurai and Tomlinson is that the latter are writing in a different era where unequivocal belief in science, technology and universal humanity can no longer be supported. A rigorous homage must now be paid to cultural “difference” (*ibid.*, 173) but this does not mean that belief in media and communication technologies and the hopeful global future that they hold in store for us is dissolved. For this reason, I think that Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s guarded cosmopolitan optimism, and the manner in which it is constructed analytically and rhetorically, is not so different after all from its Western predecessors of the last century.<sup>10</sup>

As a concluding remark, I want to note that the limitations of postmodern cosmopolitanism point to a more substantial weakness in that position: it is not really a vision. Instead, it repeats in the form of a vision a certain analysis of what exists. What I mean by this is that Appadurai’s and Tomlinson’s visions of post-nationalism or cosmopolitanism are in fact already substantially contained within the concept of cultural globalization itself (or deterritorialization, or hybridization, or similar terms). As a consequence, those projections seem to be merely additive. Because of that, one even suspects that they are offered as cloaks which hide the absence of more ambitiously critical ideas. For this reason, and for all of his writing concerning the importance of “imagination”, Appadurai’s work seems to be marred precisely by the lack of it. Similarly, Tomlinson (1999a, 207) concludes his journeys into globalization theory and the media with the realization that his work emanates “rather low-key, modest cosmopolitanism”. Indeed it does, we might agree. In the following final Chapter, I would like to offer an explanation of why this is so, through a discussion of the historical conjuncture in which academic globalization theory rose to prominence.

<sup>10</sup> Since the history of such sentiments is so long, one doubts that the positive futurology of electronic media technologies and the assumed global awareness to which they give rise is fundamentally illusory.





## PART IV CONCLUSION



## 7. CONCLUSION: ACADEMIC GLOBALIZATION THEORY AND THE NEOLIBERAL MOMENT

My discussion so far has been motivated by two main concerns: the attempt to gain deeper understanding of academic globalization theory in its different forms, as well as the need to conduct a critical evaluation of what I considered to be its shortcomings. Having already reviewed and criticized the key arguments made by Castells, Lash, Appadurai and Tomlinson on the topic of media and communications, I want to continue with both of these concerns in this concluding Chapter. I will now turn to what Ritzer (2001, 29) has defined as the “external-social” dimension in the evaluation of social theories, that is, to a “more macro level”, where we “look at the larger society and the nature of its impact on sociological theorizing”.<sup>1</sup> It would be hard to deny that while theories of globalization, like any other social and cultural theories, register changes and comment on them, they also reflect those changes. Theories are “ideational entities” that can be submitted to the same theoretical arsenal and empirical assessment that sociologists use to take stock of other social and ideational phenomena (*ibid.*, 14). Thus I see no reason why current social and cultural theories, including academic globalization theory, should be exempt from such analysis. They are not produced by “free-floating intellectuals” (Karl Mannheim), but by professionals working within specific institutional settings which are determined not only by their immediate intellectual milieu but also by the historical and social context that surrounds them.

The analysis of the historical conjuncture that surrounds academic globalization theory helps us to understand the assumptions guiding this field. In addition, it serves a critical purpose, namely, the identification of political aspects of sociological thought. Such analysis is not merely polemical, for it has a constructive emancipatory goal. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, 183) write that sociologists should “avoid being the toy of social forces” and be, instead, aware of those forces also in relation to their own practice, even if a full liberation from social determinants is not possible to attain. Yet it is certainly possible to try to limit or register their effects through reflection on the economic, social and political factors and tendencies that affect the formation of social theory.

The concept of globalization dates back at least to the 1960s (Waters 2001, 2), but academic globalization theory is a more recent intellectual phenomenon, becoming prominent only in the 1990s. What kind of historic trends and events are important for this period? Writing of the 1990s, Castells (2000b) lists as such the so-called information technology revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise and crises of Asian Pacific economies and the unification of Europe. As the momentous social developments of the new millennium, we may propose the September 11, 2001 terrorist

<sup>1</sup> Ritzer (2001, 25–30) makes a distinction between “external-social” influences and “internal-intellectual” developments in human sciences. While this distinction has heuristic value, it should not be confused with how sociological theories actually develop. As Smelser (1989, 423) notes with regard to sociology, “much of its subject-matter is dictated by real and perceived trends in the larger society” – in other words, the “external” becomes “internal” in sociological theorizing, especially when major political shifts in the social world induce observable changes in theoretical outlooks. In the present Chapter, I discuss this theme with regard to the rise of academic globalization theory.

attacks in the United States, the subsequent “wars on terror”, alongside increasing concern for the effects of global warming and for the sufficiency of the world’s material resources. A case can also be made that the new millennium is characterized by the continuing impact of new digital technologies and Asia’s increasing economic power. Yet the United States still maintains its position as the world’s largest economy and certainly the mightiest military power. “Thus while the relative weight of America in the global economy is plainly declining, with the rapid rise of alternative capitalist power centres, the political leverage of the United States in a now densely interconnected universe of profit and privilege [...] remains incommensurable with that of any other state” (Anderson 2007, 10–11).

These are some of the main trends in the larger society that have formed the context for social and cultural theorization recently in the West, but also elsewhere. The rise of academic globalization theory has occurred along with them, but the most perceptible intellectual development in social and cultural theory of the past two decades has been the general pluralization of theoretical perspectives. The grand orientations that commanded attention in the period between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s, especially liberal functionalism and Marxism, have made room for a situation in which representatives of poststructuralism, feminism, discourse analysis, risk society analysis, postmodern social theory, neo-Marxism, information society theory, evolutionary psychology, queer theory, systems theory, actor network theory, chaos theory and many others all compete for a place in the academic sun and wage “theory wars” (Kellner 1995, 20–24). Some of these orientations are intimately entangled with each other, but the overall condition is highly variegated to the extent that it is also highly confusing: it is more difficult than ever to establish common intellectual and political interests or a firm basis for collective scientific exploration. For those who greet such postmodern pluralism with enthusiasm and who are fashionably “in love with indeterminacy and incompleteness” (Callinicos 1999, 314), this is all very good news.

Reflecting the recent pluralizing trend, Rahkonen (2004, 9) points out that already a hundred years ago Max Weber emphasized that the intellectual and conceptual apparatus of social sciences has to renew itself continuously. Social sciences were in Weber’s view historical cultural sciences “to which the eternally onward flowing stream of culture perpetually brings new problems”. The “result is the perpetual reconstruction of those concepts through which we seek to comprehend reality” (Weber 1949, 104, 105). The transition into the new millennium has been a period of continuous declaration of the obsolescence of former concepts of social theory, the embodiment of which is Beck’s (2007, 287) claim that we have to get rid of the “zombie categories” of earlier – “first”, “industrial”, “solid”, “simple”, etc. – modernity and find new ones which are more appropriate for the “second modernity” that is characterized by all-inclusive contingency. Since the 1990s in particular, many sociologists and cultural theorists have been engaged in the production of all kinds of buzzwords which stand for penetrating social and cultural changes without, however, being concerned to counter them with the realization that not everything has changed. It seems that the magic evocativeness of the new expression is seen as offering a sufficient compass for

scientific inquiry by itself. The status of *Zeitdiagnose* has been made sacrosanct. In light of this, we should note that Weber (1949, 111) also wrote that his discussion of the perishability of all intellectual apparatuses “should not be misunderstood to mean that the proper task of the social sciences should be the continual chase for new viewpoints and new analytical constructs”. “*On the contrary*”, he continued, “nothing should be more sharply emphasized than the proposition that the knowledge of the *cultural significance of concrete historical events and patterns* is exclusively and solely the final end which, among other means, concept-construction and the criticism of constructs also seek to serve” (ibid., 111).

How can we be sure what historical developments are the most important ones, deserving to be the core objects of scientific study and concept construction? The theorists whose work I examined in the last three Chapters offer technology-induced changes in time and space or cultural mixing as the most momentous developments of the present era. Both of these views are intertwined with the concept of globalization. But there are other concepts with which scholars try to understand the present. One of these is the concept of neoliberalism which, for all of its contestedness, also refers intimately to “concrete historical events and developments” of recent times. Like globalization, neoliberalism is related to broad social and cultural changes. Unlike it, however, it also refers to continuities within the worldwide constellation of the capitalist mode of production. While the global social situation is now declared by many key contemporary theorists to be about chronic change and chaotic contingency, less attention has been paid by them to the manifestation of very long-term organic tendencies of capitalism that are now carried on by the neoliberal project: its geographic expansion and socio-cultural penetration. This is something that needs to be discussed alongside to globalization.

In this Chapter, I am not primarily concerned with neoliberalism as a real material phenomenon. That is, I will not offer a detailed outline of how the world has been affected by neoliberalist restructuring on economic, social and political levels. I will discuss these matters here merely as a backdrop to the main reflection of how the neoliberal moment is related to the development of the intellectual apparatus of academic globalization theory and the specific thought constructs therein. My motivation for such inquiry is akin to what comes forward in Richard Johnson’s (2007, 96) observation concerning the state of current academic discussion:

“Cultural studies and that style of sociology often called ‘social theory’ have shared a fascination with the new and also, all too often, a rather short historical memory. We all want to say something new about something new. [...] The interest in change of an epochal character adds gravity to typically abstract arguments with only occasional examples. This begs many questions about the uneven coexistence of old and new, and the complex play of emergence and continuity, with the old often playing new roles in emerging formations (e.g. Williams, 1977: 121–7). Contemporary examples are the role of religions in global politics today, or the recurrence of a fundamentalist belief in markets. How do we distinguish, moreover,

between what, in Gramsci's terms, is 'organic' and what 'conjunctural', what is future-forming and what is ephemeral, or even cyclical in its occurrence (1971: 177–8). Most worrying, perhaps, in classic sociological description, is the lack of recognition of how theories are shaped by political agenda."

If the intellectual apparatus is such that it can only pinpoint phenomena that are designated as transformations, the society will indeed look totally contingent and unpredictable, structured by such complex factors and flows that their logic becomes all but incomprehensible. This, I think, is what has happened in recent academic discussions of second modernity, globalization and complexity. In those discussions, change itself has become a theoretical fetish which is invoked in the construction of a framework according to which society is always "turbulent", in the process of being constantly in the making, as in Lash's (2002) exaggerated perspective on "global information culture" or in Appadurai's (1996, 47) claim that "chaos" is now the required analytic term rather than "stability" or "systematicness". The idea that human life is about creativity, unpredictable occurrences and the sprouting up of emergent phenomena that cannot be explained through materialist or mechanical analysis, is, of course, one of the cornerstones of vitalism, with its romantic undertones. As the fetish of change has taken root in social theory, interest in relatively invariant social trends, structures and relations has been declared outmoded (e.g. Taylor 2001; Beck 2002; Gane 2004). The current academic style that accompanies this trend resembles, as Slavoj Žižek (1999, 354) notes, "the obsessional neurotic who talks all the time and is otherwise frantically active precisely in order to ensure that something – what *really matters* – will *not* be disturbed, that it will remain immobilized". As this has happened, that which "*remains the same* in this global fluidity and reflexivity, [and] what serves as the very motor of this fluidity" has been left in the shadows: "the inexorable logic of Capital" (ibid.).

It is not my intention to claim that the logic of capital is the only thing that matters for social and cultural analysis. However, I find worthwhile to ask the question regarding why a new type of *Zeitgeist* sociology has emerged at the same time when that logic has been found to be less worthy of consideration than before. This mood is visible, for example, in Nicholas Gane's (2004) *The Future of Social Theory*, a book of interviews with renowned contemporary social theorists, which finds much pleasure in the idea that there is life "beyond Marx", as "new spaces are opening for dynamic thinking and for theoretical and conceptual innovation" (ibid., 4, 8). What I find to be of importance in a critical response to such declarations is not the attempt to rescue Marx's standing as some kind of towering oracle of social theory. There is no need to worship particular thinkers, classic or contemporary, however visionary they might be. Instead, the crucial matter is the fact that the exhortation to go "beyond Marx" reflects a willingness to do away with analyses that are sensitive to capitalism-specific phenomena. I find this is odd at a time when such phenomena have been intensifying.

Neoliberalism is a concept that helps to orient critical discussion of current social developments, and as such it is certainly not easily defined as a "zombie category", dead or backward-looking. However, for all of its associations with topical concerns, it is a

conceptual innovation that is notably absent in academic globalization theory. Why is this so? As for my four exemplars, Castells discusses neoliberal policies generally as one mechanism which brought about a more economically integrated (or networked) world (Castells 2000a, 135–147), while the others bypass it, for all practical purposes, and turn for other concepts which describe radical technological or cultural transformations. The critical argument that I am making here, and which I will elaborate more in the following discussion, is not a totalistic claim that there is nothing new with recent information technology innovations or cultural reorganizations. However, what I am proposing is that there is something symptomatic in the way in which academic globalization theorists are evading the question of how capitalist dynamics have been fortified in social and cultural life. I argue that this tendency is not unconnected from the ideological power of neoliberalism, from its potency to close off alternative imaginations and direct attention to issues that do not tamper with the rule of the society – including intellectual institutions – through market principles.

In order to justify this claim – with does not deny the relative autonomy of scientific work but which nonetheless refers to specific tendencies in it – I want to offer some starting-points that suggest a conjunction of academic globalization theory and neoliberalism. First, and most elementarily, academic globalization theory emerged precisely at the same time when neoliberalism was entrenched in the political imagination and programmes of political restructuring throughout the world, that is, in the period between late 1980s and early 1990s. Likewise, the usage of “neoliberalism” in academic articles became noticeable in the 1990s (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, 138), at the same time when “globalization” became a catchphrase. Second, there are homologies between neoliberal ideology and mainstream academic globalization theory. Both of them express polemics against the state, both of them emphasize the “creative destruction” caused by new information and communication technologies and both of them find optimistic potential in the individualization of subjects and the fluidity of identities. The search for positivity is striking when set against the realities of market dominance and the enforced individual self-realization which has become an institutional demand and functional requirement of the capitalist economy (Honneth 2004, 471). The anxieties that these have created, the “emotionally fossilized set of demands under whose consequences individuals today seem more likely to suffer than to prosper” (ibid., 474), has been swept under the carpet in much recent social and cultural theory. This is very different from Gramsci’s “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”. It is optimism of both, and in this, too, contemporary theorists are mimicking the upbeat neoliberal ideology regarding the nature of social transformation. Third, I want to repeat the fact that academic globalization theory is resistant to the analysis and even basic recognition of neoliberalism. If we take into account what Hall (1996b) has defined as the root of how identities are formed – namely that it is not only based on identification but also on taking explicit distance from something – then we can maintain that this avoidance is a key characteristic of academic globalization theory and not a random occurrence.

In the following sections, I will continue this commentary and fuse it with previously presented globalization theory perspectives on media and communications. The point

of this Chapter is to politicize academic globalization theory. First, I will explore the theme of neoliberalism insofar as it is, as an ideology, convergent with certain features of academic globalization theory. Second, I will connect that issue to the mediatization of social and cultural theory, a recent phenomenon which is intimately integrated to academic globalization theory. These two issues have definite affinities that can be made explicable through the concept of utopia, which plays a key analytical role in this Chapter alongside the concept of neoliberalism. Finally, after noting the confluences of academic globalization theory with neoliberalism and the mediatization of social and cultural theory, I will offer remarks on why other theoretical resources besides academic globalization theory are needed.

## 7.1 Neoliberalism and Globalization

To what does the term neoliberalism refer? Like many concepts that pinpoint large-scale social developments, neoliberalism has a tangled intellectual inheritance (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009). It was first used by German economists and legal scholars of the Freiburg school between the First and the Second World Wars. The original usage of “neoliberalism” was quite different from what it signifies today, but a crucial point is that early on it signalled attempts to revive classical liberalism after the years of the Great Depression, which saw a world-wide loss of trust in capitalism, and especially in unregulated markets. After the Second World War, the concept was used positively in conjunction with moderately liberal economic policies that were directed towards post-war reconstruction and economic growth, first in Germany and then in Latin America (*ibid.*, 145–147).

All of this was altered after “neoliberalism” became associated with Pinochet’s coup d’état in Chile in 1973 and his radical policy prescriptions thereafter. Since that time, neoliberalism has become primarily a negative concept, a word for market fundamentalism and its bad social consequences. Originally, the negative connotation of neoliberalism was established in the 1980s by critical Latin-American scholars studying their region’s political economy. Later on, the term diffused into English language scholarship and it began to be used more broadly as a description of pro-market economic policies everywhere (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, 149–152). Since the 1980s, the concept has had a strong negative valence in scholarly discussions. It is hard to find instances of defence of “neoliberalism” from a pro free market position in English-language academic journals; in them, “negative uses of neoliberalism vastly predominate over positive uses”, and those who favor the so-called free market policies “employ other language” (*ibid.*, 142, 153).

Thus, “neoliberalism” is as a strong political label. Mainstream economists rarely use the term because of its negative associations with the Reagan and Thatcher “revolutions” (Auerbach 2007, 27). For critical political economists, the selfsame reason is a strong motivation to put the concept under close scrutiny. As a consequence, hegemonic struggles rage around its meaning. For those who are critical of what it signifies, it is a concept that has stimulated a lot of discussion and action. For those who see the policies and structural changes associated with neoliberalism as historical necessities



or even as sources of moral and social progress, the concept is either a marker of a welcome revival of liberalist principles or one that must be discredited altogether, since it has been so thoroughly hijacked by the left. Recently in Finland, the former right-wing social democratic Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (2008), still highly influential in public life, singled the term out in order to stigmatize those who he called “anti-intellectuals”, i.e., critical intellectuals who are too radical, in his eyes, in criticizing the virtues of the market and using neoliberalism as their hobby-horse. This critique from a politician who was right in the middle of neoliberal restructuring of Finland in the 1990s reminds one that there are perils, and not merely of analytical variety, in using the concept in the present times. It is sanctioned by the establishment with a resolve that is not deployed against the usage of the less loaded term of “globalization”.

Historically, neoliberalism, in the common critical sense, must be considered as both a theory of political-economic practices and those practices themselves. As a theory, neoliberalism is founded on a certain political-philosophical conception of the relationship between the state and the market. It is a conception that arose in the United States and in Europe in the period between 1920s and 1940s, although it “had long been lurking in the wings of public policy” and neo-classical economics in the second half of the nineteenth century (Harvey 2005, 19, 20). As regards where neoliberalism’s ideological centre of gravity lies, we can point to the forceful defence of private property, competitive market and individual freedom formulated by economists and political philosophers Ludwig von Mises, Walter Lippmann, Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman before, during and after the Second World War. In particular, they were against state intervention in political and economic life. This is a theme which they considered in all of the leading forms that such intervention took at that time, ranging from the United States under New Deal to the Third Reich and, of course, to the Soviet Union. A strong association was made by these thinkers between political dictatorship and a planned economy, a combination that they saw arising out of disrespect for the fundamental laws of free markets and individual competition. Neoliberalism is a political philosophy which holds that society should emulate the workings of the “free market” as its organizing principle.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the inauguration of the neoliberal philosophy, such ideas fell on deaf ears. In his manifesto *The Good Society*, published in the late 1930s, Lippmann carried out a frontal assault against “the dominant dogma of the age”, opposed only by “a handful here and there”, whereby “throughout the world, in the name of progress, men who call themselves communists, socialists, fascists, nationalists, progressives, and even liberals, are unanimous in holding that government with its instruments of coercion must, by commanding people how they shall live, direct the course of civilization and fix the shape of things to come” (Lippmann 2004 [1937], 3–4). His charge was not an immediate breakthrough. Capitalist countries were still reeling under the effects of the Great Depression, and as a response to them, Keynesian principles of state regulation of the economy became widely adopted. After the Second World War, Keynesian policies

2 Unsurprisingly, the real practices of neoliberalism are often contrary to neoliberal ideology, such as when governments who claim to be bastions of the “free market”, introduce protectionist measures, give state subsidies to leading industries and place restrictions on the free movement of people.

were normalized as the method with the help of which policy-makers sought to revitalize the economy and keep it under control (Harvey 2005, 20–21).

The situation changed in the 1970s when the Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation and economic management started to show signs of weakness. Most importantly, the post-war economic boom came to an end in the West. This put pressures on the capability of Western industrial-capitalist states to finance their welfare responsibilities, which had expanded phenomenally during the same period and which were also considered as a burden on capital (Smart 2003, 34–36). Governments were having great difficulties in meeting the expectations of both capital and the people, in managing the economy and securing its growth and in serving as the buffer which protected people against the social consequences of capitalism. As a result of the crisis of legitimacy that was produced by the new situation, “increasingly, rather than corporatist centralized planning, flexibility and mobility came to be identified as vital for maintaining the competitive imperative of capitalism” (ibid., 36). Through neoliberal political measures that have been put into practice globally since the 1970s, the state has been made substantially more responsive to the needs of capital. In a symbolic move that reflected the winds of change, the Noble Prize for economics was awarded to von Hayek in 1974 (together with Gunnar Myrdal) and to Friedman (alone) in 1976.

Friedman has served as a key inspiration for how neoliberal economics and political philosophy have been put into practice since the early 1970s – for example, in Chile under Pinochet, in Great Britain during Thatcher’s reign and in the United States during the Reagan presidency. These are merely the tip of the iceberg, though. As Harvey (2005, 3) notes, “almost all states, from those newly minted after the collapse of the Soviet Union to old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden, have embraced [...] some version of neoliberal theory and adjusted at least some policies and practices accordingly”. There are national variations in how the adjustment has occurred and it is clear that not all policies after the so-called Keynesian compromise, even in the case of Thatcher and Reagan governments, have been strictly neoliberal. Needless to say, there is always a gap between theory and practice. Furthermore, Keynesian practices are still present, a prime example of which is the continuation of high-volume state-spending on the military in the United States, which has a huge effect on its (and the global) economy in general.

Yet neoliberalism has become firmly established as an ideology and as a set of policies. Confidence in the market and in the idea that the state should serve its interests rather than some other goal has been increasing over the last 30 years throughout the world. Policies and principles of deregulation of industries and privatization of public enterprises, fiscal prudence and passivity, reduction of taxes, management of the public sector via methods developed in the private sector (which resemble taylorist command and control mechanisms that are otherwise seen as defunct), removal of welfare benefits in the name of making people more “active” in the market, the reduction of social safety nets in general in many countries and belief in the desirability of free capital mobility are all manifestations of the neoliberal orthodoxy and revision of global capitalism (Hay 2007, 54–55; Harvey 2005, 23). The essence neoliberal globalization consists

in the fact that it has “reinforced the capitalist character of contemporary societies” by commodifying “things which up to now were not subject to the ‘capitalist spirit of accountability’ (Max Weber): education and health, plant, animal and human genes, knowledge and information and inter-human relationships themselves” (Klein and Brie 2008, 73).

The neoliberalization of the world is by no means total, but it remains a hegemonic project. Lippmann’s 1930s vision of “The Good Society” has begun to be realized in recent decades. In a full inversion of his thesis (see citation above), neoliberalism has become “the dominant dogma of the age” which holds that the market “with its instruments of coercion must, by commanding people how they shall live, direct the course of civilization and fix the shape of things to come”. Besides being ingrained in political practices, neoliberalism has succeeded in becoming a powerful social imaginary that enables those practices. The notion that “there is no alternative” to capitalist globalization, a slogan originally attributed to Thatcher, is widespread. Žižek (1994, 1) claims that nowadays “nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer whereas popular imagination is persecuted by the visions of the forthcoming ‘breakdown of nature’, of the stoppage of all life on earth – it seems easier to imagine the ‘end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the ‘real’ that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe”. Žižek is characteristically extreme in his formulation, but I find it plausible to claim that ecologically minded critics are generally more popular in public than critics of the capitalist market.<sup>3</sup>

The feeling that history has come to an end after the collapse of state socialism has caught the imagination in academia as well. A striking example is the trajectory of Anthony Giddens’s social theory. His earlier work, before the collapse, was centred on discussing the merits of socialism and capitalism and producing a synthesis of them. By contrast, his later work has been characterized by a turn towards the right and the adaptation of social democracy to the triumph of capitalism which has destroyed, in his mind, the former left-right political division and caused a shift from “emancipatory politics” of inequality to “life politics” of lifestyle, consumption and identity (Loyal 2003, 150–155). Thus, he vocally supported and partly devised the new labour programme of “the third way”, which has, on analysis, consolidated and extended Thatcher’s neoliberal reforms in the British society (Watkins 2004). In general, the ways in which the trajectory of social and cultural theory imitates the political turn towards neoliberalism have been more indirect. Yet they are still discernible, and Giddens is by no means an isolated case.

3 The global financial and economic crisis, starting in 2007–2008, has brought to the surface the negative social consequences of neoliberal policies and with it, offered some new avenues for criticism of the capitalist market. This does not necessarily mean the end of neoliberalism, however. While there is a loss of trust in the self-regulating wisdom of the market and while states have taken more active role in the economy (especially via fiscal stimulus), neoliberal or monetarist ideas are still powerful. Furthermore, Harvey (2009) is right to point out that neoliberalism is at its heart a “class project”, aimed at consolidating class power, and that the current crisis may very well lead to “a far greater consolidation of the capitalist class” than before.

## 7.2 Neoliberalism: Utopia or Anti-Utopia?

On the basis of my discussion of neoliberalism hitherto, it would seem that this ideology is highly anti-utopian, especially in the sense that it represents itself as the model philosophy of historical inevitability. In fact, this is partly true. The idea that “there is no alternative” is certainly not a breeding ground for utopian thinking, which has in any case been suspect since the demise of state socialism. The anti-utopian aspect of neoliberalism is also perceptible in its academic form. After the Second World War, economists have increasingly desired to emulate the “hard sciences” such as mathematics in their search for universal presuppositions, at the expense of analyzing historical specificities of different types of economic systems (Hodgson 2001, 232). This development is most palpable in neoliberal economics, where there have been strong attempts “to show or claim empirical regularities in economics, analogous to the fundamental constants of physics” (ibid.). Surely, then, there is nothing utopian with the economic theory of neoliberalism: it merely reproduces facts to which we have to adapt, just as we adapt to the forces of gravity for our own safety.

As a sweeping characterization, however, this presumption is not valid. It is very common to associate utopias and utopianism with socialist or communist thought, but as Hodgson (1999) points out, pro-market libertarians have been equally, if not more, utopian in their schemes. Von Hayek’s “own utopian vision pervades his writings and it is much more considered and detailed than that of Marx”; in contrast to the latter, he “devoted a whole book [*The Constitution of Liberty*, 1960] to an exposition of his own utopian thinking” (ibid., 6). In general, neoliberalism offers a utopia of individualism and freedom, freedom from totalitarianism and the tyranny of the state. It has been a supremely successful vision. The notion that markets are dynamic while the state is fossilized has become a widely held opinion not only in the United States, the model neoliberal country, but also in formerly social-democratic countries of Western Europe. The Reagan and Thatcher revolutions in the 1980s, the parliamentary victories of Blair’s new labour and other post-leftist socialist parties in many parts of Western Europe in the 1990s, or the ascension to power of right-wing parties in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Finland in the 2000s are all examples of how market-friendly political programs have been winning ground. Against that dynamism, the actually existing left that resolutely defends the welfare state seems like a group of backward-looking naysayers.

In order to understand this development – the fact that neoliberalism has become the encouraging political vision of the age – we need to take into account what Candeias (2008) has called the “dialectics of neoliberalism”. He makes the crucial observation that while neoliberalism has succeeded in penetrating the whole society with its principles of competition and economic benefit, this has not been achieved through the application of economic theory in some pure form. Instead, as in any struggle for hegemony, neoliberalism, as an ideology that is designed to serve the ruling classes first and foremost, has re-articulated itself by making compromises and by fusing within itself the interests of subordinated social groups. Thus it has managed to marginalize and take the sting out of the critical potential that those groups represent.

Candeias gives several examples in this regard, but the central lesson is learned by looking at how the neoliberalist movement has positioned itself against the repressions of the “paternalist social state”. The paternalism or the patriarchalism of the state were already well-developed themes for the so-called 1968 generation, themes which came forward in films, rock lyrics, political discussions and in everyday consciousness of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The revolt that they instigated was essentially directed against social conformism, paternal authority (schools, church, military, judiciary, public service media, etc.) and the normative repression of life-styles. It was the genius of neoliberalism to present this as caused by “excessive regulation” on the part of the state:

“Neoliberal ‘ideology critique’ takes aim at the “capability of the welfare state to practice repression” [Herbert Marcuse 1968] and it opposes this to the civil society. In this way, neoliberalism offers interpretations which direct action towards change: it offers spuriously clear guidelines for subjects to adopt. The freedom of the individual is elevated, in a way that panders to emotions, as a counterbalance to the paternalist welfare state. The left has also emphasized this, though differently. Here the reactionary tendencies of the neoliberals meet the emancipatory demands of the left, but within the context of changed relations of power. As a consequence, the former ‘60s radicals’, greens and social democrats become themselves the driving force behind the orientation towards ‘self-responsibility’ and the dissolution of public structures.” (Candeias 2008, 53 [my translation]; see also Candeias 2007, 307–308)

Essentially the same argument comes from Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, especially 199–202) who note how the 1960s critique of state oppression and labour union bureaucratism paved the way for “the new spirit of capitalism” with its rhetoric of innovation and creativity. The great irony of the neoliberal utopia of individual freedom is that it has arrived at the moment when utopias have been declared dead, when “history has ended” (Francis Fukuyama) and the capitalist liberal democracy has been announced as the final condition – the closest thing we are likely have to any utopia. It is a most peculiar amalgam: the closing of the political universe with a political philosophy and the neutralization of utopian thinking with a utopian vision of universal market rule. It is, therefore, necessary to treat neoliberalism in a dialectical fashion, by recognizing its antinomies, its utopian and anti-utopian elements simultaneously.

Interesting paradoxes ensue on the grounds of the dialectics of neoliberalism. Besides the fact that neoliberal ideology works by announcing the obsolescence of alternative ideologies, it is today in such a prominent position that it ends up emptying its own utopian character. As neoliberalism has become really existing and even hegemonic, in contrast to being on the fringes of ideology and political practice as was the case in earlier times, its status as a utopia has necessarily declined. The word utopia means literally “a place which is not” and also commonly “a place to be desired”. In terms of thinking about the society, we may refer with it to “a social-economic reality

that is both non-existent and alleged by some to be desirable” (Hodgson 1999, 4). It is still possible to debate the worldwide neoliberal reality on the grounds of whether it is desirable, but it is not possible to claim that it does not exist. It exists “by orienting the economic choices of those who dominate economic relationships”, thus adding “its own symbolic force to these relations of forces” (Bourdieu 1998). In this situation, neoliberal ideologists must stick to their strategy and present as utopian things which have already been realized, namely, the re-making of the world in the image of the pure and perfect market.

One implication of this for the daily life of millions is that the consumption of commodities, at least those that are necessities, becomes a carrier of utopian longings through its elevation as the principal goal of life. Thus, “in a reified and reifying society, the sphere of consumption can, indeed must, perform a liberating, ‘spiritual’ function” (Bewes 2002, 262). As the neoliberal rule longed for by its pioneering philosophers 70 years ago has become a reality, although not an uncontested reality, this means that those who do not succumb to it will be “considered suspect, potentially dangerous or virtually raving” (LeCourt 2001, 4). What is left is the purification of the last remnants of non-market-fundamentalist thoughts and practices, especially in the public sector which has traditionally been exempted from overtly capitalist control mechanisms, precisely for the reason that they are considered as perilous for its autonomy.

But is everything bad with the neoliberal trajectory of global societal development? Keeping in mind the dialectics of neoliberalism, the answer is a guarded “no”. Paternalistic control, either as a cultural attitude or as part of institutional practices of state institutions is bad in itself, and the loosening of its grip has no doubt been an emancipatory experience for many social groups and individuals. Moreover, modern states have in many cases failed on a grand scale to implement “schemes to improve the human condition”, such as the massive projects of industrialization and forced collectivization that dislocated millions of peasants and left piles of bodies in their wake (Stalin’s Russia, Nyerere’s Tanzania and Mao’s China), all of which were conducted as experiments that were meant to show the redundancy of capitalism (Scott 1998).

The murderous failures of state-induced collectivism give some pause for thought regarding the feasibility of grand utopias. Utopias can become reified. It is not, however, necessary to assume that all utopian thinking is by its nature corrupted. Surely there is the possibility to learn from past mistakes – what a bleak conception of humanity we end up with otherwise, in consensus with the flat mental landscape of neoliberalism – and be more cautious with utopias, that is, without trying to follow some closed blueprint for a good society that must be rammed down everybody’s throats. Utopian thinking is desirable: it gives momentum to discussion concerning socio-economic goals. What is more, “anti-utopian discourses have often inadvertently presumed, or ended up suggesting, a utopia of their own” (Hodgson 1999, 8).

In the present historical conjuncture, the critique of utopian thinking is organically connected to neoliberal hegemony. It blooms with the claim that an endpoint of history has been reached in the form of global liberal capitalism. However, this is a false claim, for “contemporary societies are, on the one hand, capitalist, inasmuch capitalist production and profit dominate economy and society. Yet, on the other hand, they are

not *only* capitalist, because as a result of the struggles for democracy, social justice, peace, sustainability and emancipation, counter-tendencies were and are brought to bear” (Klein and Brie 2008, 74). This offers “developmental potential” (ibid.) for utopian thought that does not start from the presupposition that capitalism, especially in its present totalizing stage, is on par with the laws of nature.

The ossification of politics that follows neoliberal globalization has other consequences for the construction of utopias. It is my claim, supported by Hodgson (1999, 7), that such a massive denial of social alternatives creates a void of imagination. This void makes room for visions that are far more limited in their utopian character. The political implications of this are obvious to anyone who has paid attention to recent parliamentary politics in, say, Western Europe. But this is also the point where mainstream academic globalization theory converges with neoliberalism and offers an example of the latter’s intellectual influence. Academic globalization theory has been developed in an intellectual context that was formerly permeated with, or at least more conducive to, discourses that were critical of capitalist domination of the society. Especially with the collapse of state socialism that has reoriented the lines of debate, discussion centres on issues other than the human consequences of the present socio-economic order, or is characterized by different degrees of submission to it. In this situation, thinkers on the left have compensated “for an experience of defeat with a rhetoric of supersession” (Anderson 1998, 74). This remark leads us to another intellectual trend that has influenced social theory together with neoliberalism: namely, its *mediatization*.

### 7.3 The Mediatization of Social Theory and its Problematic Consequences

As I showed in the preceding Chapters in which I examined the works of Castells, Lash, Appadurai and Tomlinson, discussions about the media and communications have become widespread in social and cultural theory. It needs to be recognized, of course, that the media and communications are things without which we cannot understand social and cultural relations and their changing forms. Human social evolution has been characterized by the extension of social communication, co-operation and also conflicts through space and time, and the development and deployment of different communication technologies with which this has taken place (Garnham 2000, 3). Social theory would be much more impoverished today if it did not include media and communications within its realm. Nonetheless, we can debate the present high degree and manner of their inclusion. The tendency towards the mediatization of social theory is manifested especially in the fascination with new electronic communication technologies, which has produced a theoretical discourse in which the media are seen as the very essence of society and social relations. I find this highly problematic, for reasons I will soon outline. First, however, let us examine the mediatization of social theory more closely.



While the notion that the media and communications are keys to the assessment of social and cultural changes may sound self-evident today, things have not always been this way. The history of sociological thought shows that the media (as institutions, technologies or cultural products) have not always held such a prominent position in academic discussions. According to Thompson (1994, 27–30), social theorists had failed to see that the media are a central feature of social life. It is indicative that the author of “the most influential social theory” (Callinicos 1999, 237) in Western academia around the middle of the twentieth century, Talcott Parsons, did not write much about the media, even though they arguably had also in his time a major impact on the functionalist integration and maintenance of modern social systems. Thompson lays stress on the idea that the media have contributed crucially to the expansion of consciousness that is a constitutive factor behind modernization, as they have generated new kinds of social relations and interaction between individuals. Basing his arguments on these premises, Thompson (1994, 30) wanted to situate the study of media where it belongs: “among a set of disciplines concerned with the emergence, development and structural characteristics of modern societies and their futures”.

Recent developments in the field of social theory have fulfilled Thompson’s wishes to a great extent. Media and communications have become “one of the most important and favored subjects in contemporary social study” (Amin 1998, 123). This has occurred together with the rise of new sociological concepts and theories that aim at understanding the passage from modernity (or capitalism or industrial society) to another kind of social form. There has been no shortage of these kinds of accounts in the literature of the last couple of decades, account that are in many cases overlapping. Figure 2 (below) contains some of them, including the most famous ones.

**Figure 2. Recent theoretical concepts that describe social and cultural change**

Before	After	
Modern industrial society	Risk Society	Beck (1986)
Organized capitalism	Disorganized capitalism	Lash and Urry (1987)
Modernity	Postmodernity	Harvey (1990)
Monopoly capitalism	Technocapitalism	Kellner (1989a)
Early modernity	Late modernity	Giddens (1991)
First media age	Second media age	Poster (1995)
Modernity	Globality	Albrow (1996)
Industrial society	Network society	Castells (1996)
Sovereignty of nation-states	Empire	Hardt and Negri (2000)
National manufacturing society	Global information order	Lash (2002)
National society	Cosmopolitan society	Beck (2006)



This list, which is far from being exhaustive, contains a host of theoretical concepts, many of which have already been discussed in earlier parts of this study. Some of them are more cultural ("postmodernity"), while others put emphasis on changes in the mode of production ("disorganized capitalism") or on changes in political organization of the globe ("Empire"). The concepts and the theories that lie behind them differ from each other in terms of the assumed intensity of change. Some expressions listed here stress changes inside an underlying system ("technocapitalism"), while others refer to a qualitative shift whereby an earlier social formation has been replaced by another. This seems to be especially characteristic for contemporary sociology that draws from poststructuralist thinking (e.g., Poster, Hardt and Negri and Lash).

Media and communications technologies are central for most of these current theorists. This shows up in the most evident manner in Poster's discussions concerning "the second media age" and in Lash's writings on the "global information order" (Chapter 5). In both of these works, changes in media and communications technology are directly responsible for massive social and cultural transformations. As was noted in Chapter 4, Castell's work on the network society cannot be assessed without taking into account his high interest in media and communications. Giddens, too, considers "media and communications, and their role in promoting global interdependences, as the most important dynamic force" behind the formation of new kinds of global "conjunctions", a topic that he sees more important for the analysis of globalization than "markets or economic issues" (Giddens, in Rantanen 2005b, 68). Communications technology also plays a central role in Hardt's and Negri's (2000) analysis of "Empire". In unison with academic globalization theorists, they emphasize the claim that the "deterritorializing capacities" of new information and communication technologies have undermined "modern territorial sovereignty" (ibid., 346–347). Accordingly, the "contemporary systems of communication are not subordinated to sovereignty; on the contrary, sovereignty seems to be subordinated to communication" (ibid., 346). At the same time these systems, which also determine contemporary production processes and labouring activities, have offered new tools for "the Multitude" – people who are being exploited and repressed in the new diffuse system of symbolic economy and biopower – in their equally diffuse struggle against Empire (e.g. ibid., 284–294, 404–407). Beck's (2006) book on the coming of cosmopolitan society has many references to the importance of global flows of media and communications in laying its foundations in culture and in consciousness.

We can thus argue that a process of *mediatization of social theory* has been going since the 1990s at an internationally prestigious level. In the works of highly influential contemporary sociologists, the media, especially thought of as a set of new electronic technologies, have been defined as the primary source of transformation in the society. In much recent social theory, it is the media that conditions the society. On the other hand, models which stress social, economic or political contexts that condition the media have been undermined. Media-technological thinking has become the dominant paradigm of social change (see Mattelart 2003, 2). At the same time, "invariant elements and relations" (Marx) of the capitalist mode of production, which are "omni-present beneath all the surface froth and evanescence" (Harvey 1990, 179),

have less argumentative appeal.<sup>4</sup> In contemporary sociological discourse, new media and communications technologies are arrows of the future, promising to overturn the petrifications of so-called simple modernity, changing “the way we think about the subject” and raising “the question of a social form beyond the modern” (Poster 1995, 59).

The mediatization of social theory is produced by the coalescence of a number of academic influences in the 1990s (including information society theory, medium theory, postmodern theory and globalization theory). All of these theoretical discourses have, each from their own specific angle, highlighted the role of media and communications technologies in the present era. Their common idea is that social and cultural relations have been thoroughly transformed and that we live in an increasingly borderless world whose most salient feature is the mobility of objects and identities in a global communications network. The impact of new media and communications is seen to be so devastating that they forge nothing less than a dismantlement of central elements of modernity, such as nationally fixed societies or stable forms of identity. While the above-mentioned theoretical impulses do not form a tightly knit whole, their common media-centrism ensures that there is a distinctive elective affinity between them. Influenced by those perspectives, such key sociologists as Lash, Beck, Castells and Giddens have used a common vocabulary to define social and cultural change, referring to each other’s work when describing those changes. As this kind of thinking has become widely disseminated by major publishing houses around the world, it has also dominated debates in social theory in general.

Since media-technological viewpoints have become so dominant, there is a risk of falling into an unproblematic acceptance of them (see Schirato and Webb 2003, 44). Emphatic depictions concerning the novelty of “new media” may easily congeal into uncontested principles (“normal science”) which determines how social change should be conceived, what basic elements it consists of and what consequences these have. The key causal factors today are believed to be media and communication technology innovations and the organizational structures that create the necessary prerequisites for them. This kind of viewpoint has become so naturalized that, for example, “criticisms of the information revolution’s revolutionary credentials have been increasingly marginalized. Nowadays we argue about the implications of the changes but *not* their ‘reality’” (May 2002, 20). According to Poster, there are in fact no grounds for reasonable criticism of the centrality of media and communications technology for society, since this is not a matter of judgement but, instead, validated by history itself. He argues that new electronic communication technologies do not change just “communications but basic features of social life. Whatever *theoretical* priority one wishes to place on the question of communications, when recent *historical* developments are taken into account, it must move from the periphery to the center of social science” (Poster 1995, 73–74).

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<sup>4</sup> Invariances do not refer to stability. Capitalism is a very dynamic force; what is eye-catching, however, is that the dynamic invariances of global capitalism, especially its expansiveness in production, investment, exploitation of workforce, commerce, marketing, etc., do not find their way into the current explanations of change, which emphasize instead the inner logic of communication technology.

Must it, really? The high focus on the assumed radical changes, stemming from new media and communications, in the ontological constitution of the society leaves other historical developments such as the neoliberalization of the world unexplored. The realities of the global capitalist economy, based as they are in the strengthening of relatively long-standing features, figure only faintly in the currently fashionable sociological Zeitdiagnose. Its discourse of social change is dependent on a perspective that disconnects itself from history, from the still ongoing expansion of capitalism into new areas of society and culture. The problem with theorists of second modernity and globalization is that they forget such continuities. Their work is based on thinking that does not acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of contemporary social change, which is characterized, simultaneously, by the persistence of its most fundamental structures and a transformation of less substantial ones (see Kerkelä 2004).

As an example of this, I have in mind the work of Ulrich Beck, who seems to be suffering from a distinctively narrow and uncritical focus (see e.g. Stork 2002; Elliott 2002, 302–306; Chernilo 2006, 9ff). According to him (see Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003), the classical object of sociology, modernity, has been completely transformed. He uses the concept “first modernity” to name that object, a social formation built upon institutions such as “a reliable welfare state; mass parties anchored in class culture; and a stable nuclear family consisting of a single breadwinner” (ibid., 1). That “reflexive modernization” is undermining such features is no doubt a phenomenon worth exploring, but this does not mean that we should identify it with a transformation of “the very principles of society” (ibid.). Beck’s model, like many of those presented in figure 2 (above), is a model of radical discontinuity. As such, it necessarily glosses over what has stayed the same in modern societies, for instance, the fact that current “risks”, like those of the “first modernity”, are generated by logics specific to the capitalist mode of production (which is present in both “first” and “second” modernity) – above all, the compulsive search for profits which translates into financial crises, ecological disasters and different forms of individual insecurity inside and outside of work. Those logics and their outcomes have a long history.

As regards media and communications, the existing theories of social transition are typically disinterested in the ways in which the production and consumption of electronic media are embedded in capitalist property relations and socio-economic dependencies. These features necessarily limit the revolutionary potentials of new technologies. In analyzing these trends, we must keep in mind that they take place in a historically distinctive phase of capitalist development. The current phase is indeed interlinked with new digital media and communications technologies; but it is misleading to think of them as dynamic and the underlying socio-economic system as the passive object of transformation (as in accounts according to which new information technologies are creating a new kind of capitalism). From another perspective, it is capitalism itself that actively instigates technological changes. As Marx (1973, 524) argued in the *Grundrisse*, “capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.” Therefore one could argue that globalization, understood as the overcoming of former barriers of

time and space, such a central theme for sociological *Zeitdiagnose* of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, is not at heart a technological issue, but “something intrinsic to capitalist social relations themselves” (Rosenberg 2000, 33).

Instead of examining this persistent dynamic, contemporary sociologists have turned to other factors. The mediatization of social theory is a key part of this paradigmatic shift. I refer here to the development of theories of qualitative transformation, according to which a) we are moving into a wholly different type of society, and b) media and communications technologies are central variables for the explanation of this transformation, if not the most central ones. As a sign of this development, which became noticeable in the 1990s, there has been a tendency to treat capitalism as a socio-economic system that is embedded in new media and communications structures, instead of viewing media and communications as embedded in the socio-economic system. What this means is that the determination of media and communications by that system is increasingly dismissed in sociological analysis.

I maintain that this shift of focus is in tune with neoliberalism, an ideology that claims that capitalist social relations are eternal and immutable. Referring to Marcuse’s (1968, 11) remark that social theory is “concerned with the historical alternatives which haunt the established society”, Smart (2003) writes of the neoliberal mood of the present times. It is characterized by “the paralysis of criticism in a society lacking opposition”, a society which has “resigned to living without *any* alternative” (ibid., 46). Such closure is, of course, intolerable for social theorists whose whole reason for being is centred on discovering the logic of social change. Now, if the logic of change from “early” to “late” modernity, or from “industrial society” to “network society”, cannot be uncovered by looking at how capitalist social relations have changed (as they fundamentally have not, apart from their more entrenched status because of neoliberal globalization), new explanatory variables must enter the picture. As in Marcuse’s times, it is technological development and progress that promises to project us towards a different societal existence. In the current neoliberal moment, social theorists are appropriately fascinated by new information and communication technologies, the examination of whose development not supports only the analysis of new sociality but also carries utopian overtones with it. Utopias of electronic freedom have once again become possible when the inherent properties of new technologies are seen as overriding material and market-based constraints. They uphold the promise that capitalism can rectify itself against pressing global economic, ecological and social crises, which have been exacerbated because of the present neoliberal project.

The mediatization of social theory is not, of course, a direct mirror of neoliberal ideology. It is nonetheless resonant with it, in at least two senses. As a trend, it has a) further shifted the social theoretical frame of reference from the analysis of capitalist mode of production to the latest technological developments, to what Castells (2000a, 500) calls a “networking logic”; and b) it has produced utopias that are directly linked to media and communications technologies and which are, furthermore, homological to the emancipatory vision of neoliberalism. These strains reverberate in the work of all of the globalization theorists I have discussed in this study. In order to give examples of what I have in mind here, of what I consider as parallels between the mediatization

of social theory and neoliberalism, I need to summon up certain features of academic globalization theory as discussed in previous Chapters.

As was noted above, neoliberalism is not anti-utopian; it has cultivated a rebellion against the “paternalist social state”, i.e., feelings of discontent towards “excessive” government regulation of the economy, work, life-style and culture, including the broadcasting media. The hegemony of neoliberalism is ideologically founded on its capability to present, negatively, all forms of state regulation as manifestations of government tyranny, and, positively, all forms of market deregulation as increases in individual freedom and choice.

So far, little attention has been paid to the extent to which academic globalization theory, including Castells’s recent work, parallels these patterns of political philosophy. In this context, it is useful to recall his statement that “if I had to choose now which to oppose, capital or the state, I would still say the state” (Castells, in Rantanen 2005c, 138). Castells makes critical remarks about the ideological fervour of pro-market reformists, but he finds the dynamism of neoliberal economic globalization to be preferable to the “statism” and “welfarism and government control” which suffered a crisis of legitimacy in the 1980s (Castells 2000a, 143). The transition into “informational capitalism” in the 1990s is viewed by him as the coming of a more open, creative and productive economy, bringing with it also social and cultural freedoms. Writing about the media, he emphasizes the dynamism of new digital media which have brought with them a de-massification of the older “standardized” mass media culture dominated by large networks and public broadcasters (*ibid.*, 365–371). The new media sphere dominated by the internet is for him a sphere of increasing individual choice, decentralization and flexibility, promising freedom from government and market control.

Castells mentions, but does not analyze further, the fact that large corporations determine, more and more so, the contours of the global media sphere at large. As a result of world-wide deregulation of media industries over the past decades, we have witnessed, for instance, an increasing commercialization of media content, an influx of propagation of individual life-styles and brand names (instead of visions of the common good) and a general deterioration of mainstream journalism due to several reasons – through budget cuts in the newsrooms in order to increase profit margins, through diverting attention to never-ending celebrity gossips and scandals and through the merging of corporate propaganda with journalism – all of which threaten to eradicate any critical edge that it could otherwise possess. Castells does not take sufficiently into account the ways in which the new technological logic of digital media is seamlessly intertwined with the old logic of commercial media institutions, so that persistent corporate interests may still manifest themselves powerfully. In his work, structural economic analysis yields to technological explanations; the technological properties of networked computers, their “technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualization” (Castells 2000a, 385) cancel the need to concentrate on such factors.

In Castells’s magisterial outline, the stage theory of media-technological development reigns supreme. Whereas the old system was standardized because of the properties of old mass media technology, the new technologies offer all kinds of opportunities,

based on their more open characteristics. The story of technological innovation is no doubt a theme that has made Castells so popular also among business actors who can identify with his message of how informational capitalism and its communication revolution has been made possible because of innovative entrepreneurs, investors, inventors, computer wizards and other heroic figures of the “new economy”. On this count, Castells’s message is pleasing even for neoliberals who he berates for their excesses: they are both positioned against the paternalism and “statism” of the old (non-neoliberalized) states. While Castells notes the need to maintain welfare state institutions as safety nets against social polarization, he symptomatically undermines the negative consequences of neoliberalism (especially the increasing social inequality) that occur because of the transition from a welfare state model into a competitive state model (Pelkonen 2008, 55–56). This happens, I argue, because his focus is locked onto technological developments at the expense of critical political-economic analysis.

Castells’s trilogy on the “information age” reflects the spirits of the “roaring nineties” and the concurrent belief in the power of new information and communications technology in transforming society for the better. If, however, the information technology revolution envisaged by him will prove to be a “missed opportunity”, that is, “if in a generation social inequality has not begun to be dramatically reversed, democratic institutions are not considerably more vibrant, militarism, chauvinism have not been dealt a mighty blow, the environment has not been significantly repaired, then we will have had an unfulfilled communication revolution” (McChesney 2007, 4). So far, the new historical conjuncture after the turn of the millennium shows little by way of reversal of such features. It has, instead, been marked by increasing state authoritarianism (e.g., the global “war on terror”) and the relentless domination of society and politics by market forces. In my view, this is a sign of the decreasing critical relevance of Castells’s trilogy: it is less than satisfactory in directing our focus onto a new hegemonic moment (Johnson 2007) whose dynamics are not merely technological but also political and ideological. In a new preface to the latest reprint of the second edition of *The Rise of Network Society*, Castells (2009) considers “some of the key developments of the last decade” – such as the global financial crisis that began in 2008 – in light of his trilogy. Again, however, he restates the importance of technological explanations in examining those developments, arguing that “All major social changes are ultimately characterized by a transformation of space and time in the human experience” (ibid., xxxi).<sup>5</sup>

5 It should also be noted here that in the second edition of *The Power of Identity*, Castells (2004a, 344–355) writes of “the return of the state” in the form of the geo-political unilateralism and repression of civil liberties displayed by the Bush administration in the 2000s, against which he is of course very critical. However, he considers these returns to a powerful state posture as a “historical coincidence” or “the last imperial hurrah”, based on the confluence of contingent factors that defy a “historical logic” that points towards increasing global governance. What this view overlooks is the fact that similar authoritarian reversals of globalism have occurred before, most notably in the 1930s. Rather than considering these reversals as “last imperial hurrahs”, therefore, I maintain that they represent the deep interconnections between capitalist globalization, its systemic crises and the kind of “new imperialisms” which they breed. Globalization and imperialism are “two sides of a coin” (Winseck and Pike 2007, 344), two constituents of a different “historical logic” that runs counter to an optimistic globalization theory scenario that expects the end of the nation-state and the coming of a cosmopolitan world.

In contrast, some of Castells's other recent studies, especially those that he has done with Amelia Arsenault, have more critical elements. They have analyzed the political and economic factors with the help of which the Bush administration succeeded in misinforming the US public regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Arsenault and Castells 2006) and the continuing power of global media corporations in the network society (Arsenault and Castells 2008). In the latter, the authors point out, on the basis of their description of the structures, strategies and interlocking interests of global multimedia giants, that the new "horizontal" networks of "mass self communication" do "not necessarily lead to autonomy from media business", since "multi-national media groups have become multi-national multimedia groups, privatizing and commercializing much of the Internet" (ibid., 710). They add that "despite the proliferation of blogs and other news and information sites, mainstream media organizations continue to dominate the online news market" (ibid., 719). Similar observations are also to be found in an article that Castells has written alone on this theme (Castells 2007). Even so, a fundamental contradiction remains in his work, namely an oscillation between optimistic technological determinism and a more sober realization that the internet may not be different from previous electronic media as a tool of human emancipation. He states, for instance, that "while the old struggle for social domination and counter-domination continues in the new media space, the structural bias of this space toward the powers that be is being diminished every day by the new social practices of communication" (ibid., 257–258; see also Castells 1998, 476). This is a premature conclusion, however, together with his claim that we are now moving "from the institutional realm to the new communication space" (Castells 2007, 238). Against such claims, we need to point out – as Castells, interestingly, seems to be aware of in his co-authored articles mentioned above – that "past scenarios of commercialisation, differentiated access, exclusion of the poor, privatisation, deregulation and globalisation" (Golding 1998, 147–148) are being established also in the realm of the internet, representing, precisely, the reinstatement of old institutional logics in the new communication space.

As an overall characterization of Castells's work in this context, I do not think that it is apt to call it an apologia of neoliberalism – it is far from it. However, certain neoliberal assumptions, especially the positive evaluation of recent social changes, are concurrent with his technologically optimistic account. The compatibility of Castells's work with the neoliberal project is also established because of his premature downplaying of the role of the capital, a feature which has been noted by other critics as well (see e.g. Halcli and Webster 2000). In the case of Lash, however, the relationship between social theory and neoliberal hegemony is taken to a whole new level.

Lash's (2002) analysis of global information culture essentially continues a fairly old concern that comes up in postmodern theory in general: the dissolution of a rational subject. The subjects of his information culture are completely subsumed into communications technology (as "man-machine interfaces"), having no moral or political agency. His central idea is that, as a result, ideology critique of the former kind is no longer possible. Everything (subjects, meanings, class-based differences, etc.) has been swallowed up by our immersion into global information culture. It is a flat landscape of speeded-up, out of control information and information technologies



which do not offer a “constitutive outside” (ibid., 10). This is to say that enlightenment, critical discussion, intersubjectivity, comparison of viewpoints and goal-oriented action on the basis of that have become impossible. There are no goals or visions, since “the possibility of a transcendental realm” (ibid., 9) has been destroyed. Lash advises us not to resist, but to become one with what seems to be the objective tendency anyhow, the total informationalization of society. The homology of this emphasis with the neoliberal theme of how “there are no alternatives” and how we should merely go with the flow of the global market is painfully obvious, and not accidental.

The relative lack of political-economic determination in Castells’s analysis has become absolute in Lash’s work. Lash’s “informationcritique” is a retreat, a retreat from the critique of unjust social relations to the reasoning that they are of no concern, as we have allegedly entered a world of purely technological existence from which there is no escape. This move is partly a fatalistic resignation but there is also a utopian element. With his theoretical retreat, Lash escapes from the system of unequal social relations to technological forms of life whose boundary-crossing features he celebrates as productive. Lash’s *Critique of Information* is similar to countless poststructuralist critiques in that it reduces politics to the struggle against essentialisms of Western philosophical thought. For Lash, it is new technology that causes the falling apart of demarcation walls between humans and machines, mind and matter, truth and appearance, culture and nature, and so on. In a largely similar way in which Donna Haraway (1991) conceives the “cyborg” as the dominating figure of high-tech culture, pointing to the transgression of former fixities of gendered identity, Lash (2006b, 340) sees “an informationalization of experience and a moving away of it from the human subject towards post-human experience”. For him, as for Haraway, the hybridization of human, nature and technology “becomes the deus ex machina of revolutionary social change”, whereby even “capitalist technoscience” can be affirmed as a critical practice (Sanbonmatsu 2004, 59). As was noted in Chapter 5, Lash considers global capitalism as a huge “desiring machine”. It generates new “technological life forms” which are not under the control of anyone. Power is everywhere in communication structures, not in the hands of privileged social groups. Lash’s analysis of these structures contains a degree of infantile regression: he is awestruck by their virtual omnipotency – in fact he expresses a wish to fuse with them – and is incapable of voicing protest. In Lash’s account, social theory is no longer haunted by historical alternatives. What exists (“the global information culture”) cannot be criticized, since “critique of information is in the information itself” (Lash 2002, 220).

On the basis of such reasoning, Lash argues for an esoteric, vitalist philosophy of “life” – in his case, “technological life” – which is about constant, unforeseen evolution. Everything has become possible, since evolution is not guided by established social forces. Viewed in the light of this interminable change, neoliberal developments in society are but surface currents, the analysis and critique of which does not penetrate into the deep profundity of “life” in its present technological figurations. Yet in the real life of human material existence characterized by the persistence of antagonistic dualisms between advantaged and disadvantaged groups, the excitation of social polarization still proceeds, with and without communication technologies. It proceeds



undisturbed by a poststructuralist critique that focuses on “life”, “desire”, “production”, “communications” (in the sense understood by Lash), and other concepts which have only a vague relationship to empirical facts (see Sanbonmatsu 2004, 116–117). Their relevance for the neoliberalization of current societies is equally tenuous. According to Lash (2002, 214), “globalized modernity” is under “chronic change and instability”; we can thus be sceptical about the examination of its “reproduction”. This insistence, combined with his other assertion – which is indeed only an assertion – that “the social bond of the capital relation” has been “displaced by the *communicational* bond” (Lash, in Gane 2004, 101) is what makes Lash’s theory of global information culture so symptomatic of the current neoliberal moment. It renders invisible the power of the capital, to the point of obscuring it totally, to order social relations and to reassert differences of power between classes.

The compatibility of cultural globalization theory (Chapter 6) with neoliberal ideology is founded, partly, on poststructuralist emphases that are similar to those in Lash’s work. However, there are also other themes at play. In the cultural account of globalization, the target of critique is the tyrannical nation-state that maintains homogenous identities. Yet new media and communications technologies, in particular, have created new cultural expressions and attachments. As this has happened, cultural globalization theorists see fewer reasons than before to examine critically such notions as “cultural imperialism” or “Western cultural domination”. Their place has been taken over by global cultural hybrids, deterritorializations and new imaginations, i.e., less spatially fixed cultures. This constitutes also the utopian element of cultural globalization theory. According to Appadurai, Tomlinson and others, global media and communications have created the basis for new post-national or cosmopolitan identities which permeate national boundaries and undermine the capacity of the nation-state to repress them. As in Lash’s work, desires flow more freely because of electronic mediatization. We need to understand that such notions are not altogether misplaced: their attraction is based on the correct observation that global media flows act as safeguards against national provincialism and state-based paternalism. Yet this is precisely part of the lure of neoliberalism itself. It has productive sides which make it more capable of heralding a “passive revolution” (Gramsci), that is, a strategy that gives citizens new freedoms (or at least feelings of progress and empowerment), at the same time as their role in shaping politics and economy on the higher level remains as limited as ever, or is being further diminished (Barfuss 2008, 844–847).

Despite their idiosyncrasies and ambivalences, I think that the exponents of both the media-technological and the cultural paradigm show remarkable consistency in their arguments. They contain three unifying elements: a) the nation-state is identified as the primary antagonist; b) media and communications technologies are identified as forces of social and cultural change which undermine the power of the former; and c) the penetration of capitalism in new areas of social and cultural life is not a matter of critical concern. Besides the neglect of material developments, there is also a neglect with regard to the role of the nation-state. As mainstream globalization theorists have cast their eyes on the cultural emancipation that the demise of nation-state homogeneity

promises, they have simultaneously been less interested in the ways in which nation-states practice repression all the more vigorously in other areas.

This is not unrelated to the increasing dominance of market forces, which has reconfigured the state in the past decades. All of the following point in the same direction: the ideological attack on the “nanny state”, the decreasing prospects of welfare provision and job security, and the creation of more “flexible” subjects less willing to take on capital, who consequently blame themselves (or “globalization”) instead. These developments, combined with the fact that key Western governments – possessing interlocking interests – are now busy combating terrorism, extending “security” (with the help of new surveillance technologies) and displaying a tougher attitude towards crime and immigration, means that nation-states have become, not more benign, but more punitive and authoritarian towards their citizens in certain crucial respects. It would be absurd, however, to claim that this testifies further to the need to oppose the tyranny of states rather than that of the capital, for it is precisely the intended consequence of neoliberalism that modern states have been disempowered and disabled “from interfering with the established order of society” (Unger 1998, 58). States now do the dirty work required by the tough market discipline. No longer as able as before to act as welfare providers, states have increased resources to deal with “recalcitrant members of society such as migrants, single-parent families, prisoners and ‘deviants’ or socially ‘excluded’ members of society needed to be brought under control and regulated in the interests of the neoliberal *political* agenda” (Munck 2005, 63). Unwilling to examine the political efficacy of neoliberalism, academic globalization theorists lack the means to deal with this aspect of transformation of modern states. The new political authoritarianism, typically expressed in populist terms, is for them mainly or solely the consequence of the new spatio-temporal logic of global information and communication flows, a product of nation-states and regressive social movements that are still clinging to their waning sovereignty to maintain a homogeneity of identity.<sup>6</sup>

Even with such observations, it would be wrong to claim that mainstream academic globalization theory expresses neoliberal ideology directly. Nonetheless, I argue that neoliberalist conceptions have been elaborated in globalization theory, no doubt as a consequence of their powerful hegemonic status. Neoliberalism is the dominant ideology and political force of the post-1989 period. It would be strange if the development of social theory in the 1990s and 2000s were left unaffected by its political influence. My interpretation is that the “anti-statism” of globalization theory, together with its

6 In the first edition of *The Power of Identity*, Castells (1997, 287–297) discusses rising populist authoritarianism and attacks against the federal state in the context of the United States in the 1990s, a legitimacy crisis fuelled by the convergence of diverse ideological currents (economic populism, political isolationism, Christian fundamentalism and racism, among others). More generally, however, Castells finds that the most crucial feature in the weakening of modern nation-states is the fact that “state control over space and time is increasingly bypassed by global flows of capital, goods, services, technology, communication and information” and that “the state’s capture of historical time through its appropriation of tradition and the (re)construction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects” (ibid., 243). Even though these factors, no doubt, should be taken into account, this emphasis avoids an engagement with another kind of trend that has induced a change in the status of nation-states, namely, the neoliberalization of politics. As Bromley (1999, 15) notes, “what is new in the development of the capitalist state is not a retreat of state power in relation to the economy [...] but rather that the ‘totality of [its] operations [...] are currently being reorganized in relation to its economic role’ [Poulantzas] and this role is increasingly defined in a disciplinary, neo-liberal mould”.

neglect of critical analysis of economic power, has made it vulnerable to the “paralysis of criticism” that characterizes the current neoliberal period (P. Ross 2004, 457). To this we must add a more particular trend that is visible both in globalization theory and social theory at large, namely, the cherished notion that new media and communications technologies have provided us with less culturally homogenous and less spatially fixed world, resulting in the loosening of the power of nation-states (but not the capitalist market). The emergence of such media and communications utopianism in the current historical conjuncture is another reason to think that academic globalization theory has not escaped neoliberal hegemony unscathed. When grand societal utopias have been declared impossible, and when the power of capital seems more consolidated than ever, belief in the new powers granted by new communications technologies carry on the belief that we are still on the threshold of millennial change that is pregnant with possibilities. How far, then, have we actually travelled from similar communications utopianism of the early nineteenth century (see Pemberton 2000), which was expressed with more certainty but with the same components of thought (the bypassing of national boundaries, the coming of new matrixes of space and time, the emergence of a truly cosmopolitan world culture, etc.)?

In conclusion, I argue that the main implication of neoliberalism for contemporary social and cultural theory, including academic globalization theory, is this: the talk of massive qualitative social change – the making of change into a theoretical fetish – counterbalances the realization that on the level of the socio-economic determination of human life by capitalism not much has changed, barring its intensification. This is a point to which the other key concept of my study, media, is strongly attached. The void, created by neoliberal hegemony, of utopian imagination in academia finds its expression in the mediatization of social and cultural theory, in the forceful emergence of arguments regarding media-technological changes and their sweeping socio-cultural consequences. They are paraded forward with such a force that they must not only be seen as serving historical-analytical but also utopian functions, that is, the longing for a better world in times when such longing is otherwise suspect or even considered impracticable.

#### **7.4 Final Remarks: “The Desire Called Utopia”<sup>7</sup>**

Viewed from the perspective of how social theorizing has developed in recent decades, the rise of academic globalization theory in the 1990s is not a unique event. It is but one component of a larger turn away from radical social theory that started earlier on. The influence of socialist ideas and Marxist theories peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, after which they were met with the rise of neoliberalism and the postmodern rejection of Western rationality. This shift resulted in much disorientation on the left and brought to the surface theories which were either directly antithetical to Marxism or which sought to replace its analytic focus on class and economic power with a post-Marxist framework. Academic globalization theorists have contributed to this shift

<sup>7</sup> This expression refers to the subtitle of Fredric Jameson’s (2007) recent collection of essays on the status of utopian thinking today.

by concentrating on new media and communications technologies and the process of spatialization – the overcoming of constraints of time and space in human societies – and by recasting these themes in a new paradigm that stands “as a general critique of Marxist theory”, attempting “to shift the discussion away from purely economic and political issues” (Rantanen 2005a, 46). In this, advocates of globalization theory side with poststructuralists and postmodern theorists who “claim that Marxism is an obsolete or oppressive discourse that is no longer relevant for the current era” (Best and Kellner 1991, 26).

Both media-technological and cultural theorists of globalization present themselves as balanced analysts who have come up with models that are attuned to the multidimensionality and complexity of contemporary global transformations. In Castells’s and Lash’s work, globalization is theorized and conceptualized exclusively as the coming of a world-wide technological network, while in the theory of cultural globalization formulated by Appadurai and Tomlinson, it is the complex de-centredness of cultural flows that constitutes the new analytical core. In both cases, there is substantial theoretical interest and investment in spatialization, and with it, developments in media and communication technologies. These are presented as the prime categories with which we can uncover the logic of current economic, social, political and cultural change, in a far more adequate manner than what is suggested in Marxist-socialist perspectives.

Such ideas about globalization are recounted in countless studies and journal articles. Without doubt, they have expanded our theoretical horizons and prompted us into thinking about the ramifications of global flows and networks. This is the reason why I have concentrated in on them in this study. Nonetheless, I argue that this widening is not the same thing as the overcoming of former perspectives in social theory. It has been my central concern to pinpoint the blindspots and silences that have followed in the wake of the rise of academic globalization theory. I maintain that besides justifying the critique that I have presented, those blindspots and silences also necessitate the consideration of other, more critical analyses of globalization. As the preceding Chapters have already expressed this critical concern at length, I offer only a brief summary of its main points here.

The first omission of academic globalization theory is its premature declaration that nation-states are no longer useful units of analysis, a view passionately defended by Beck (2002; 2007) in his plea to get rid of “methodological nationalism”. Academic globalization theory is a theory of the redundancy of the nation-state. It claims that in the age of global economic flows and cultural hybrids, nation-states do not have much organizing power left. Yet this is a matter of perspective and judgement. From another perspective which pertains directly to the media, Curran (2002, 183) notes that national governments are still dominant in communications policy, by means of which they continue to regulate media content, and nations still “have different languages, political systems, power structures, cultural traditions, economies, international links and histories” which influence the global media sphere. More generally, capitalism as a global social form still relies on the political and legal powers of nation-states to maintain the kind of regularity and stability it requires (Wood 2002, 176–181). Nation-

states are far from being supplanted by a unified, global form of political governance; they are indispensable for the continuation of capitalist processes – especially the ability of capital to exploit labour and to expand its reach globally (Dowd 2000, 6).<sup>8</sup>

The premature claim concerning the redundancy of nation-states leads to another omission. The continuing power of nation-states needs to be associated with another aspect of globalization of the media that is also de-emphasized in mainstream globalization theory, namely, its neoliberal character. Neoliberal globalization means that we must take into account the tensions and contradictions that arise due to the interplay of global market forces and nation-states. In a broad analysis of the transformation of television broadcasting across the world between 1983 and 2003, Jin (2007) names one such contradiction with regard to the media. The neoliberal reform has meant the break-up of public broadcasting monopolies and a shift of power to profit-driven private media companies. However, because “television remains primarily a national phenomenon”, this reform “has been influenced by sometimes cooperative and at other times conflicting relationships among the national government, domestic capitals, and transnational corporations” (ibid., 193). By concentrating on technological networks, cultural flows, hybrids and cosmopolitanisms, contradictions between persistent nation-state structures and expanding global markets are downplayed in academic globalization theory. They become visible only with the adoption of a more political-economic perspective, but this is precisely the perspective that mainstream globalization theorists disavow.

There is a general tendency and failing in both media-technological and cultural globalization theory: they are good at pointing towards changes but weak in understanding continuities (and the interplay of both dimensions). As we have seen, academic globalization theorists are operating in the mood of *Zeitdiagnose*. In other words, they offer explanations of *the qualitatively new*. They do this, in particular, by anchoring their views on the “revolutionary” features of new media and communications technologies and by providing us with a host of new thought constructs which refer to these. An alternative perspective highlights the dimension of continuity, instead of its underestimation, and the recognition that some “zombie categories” (Beck) of social theory might still be workable.

Thus, against Castells’s insistence that there is already something revolutionary in networked communications technologies (due to their technological properties), I maintain that a more fruitful and, in any case, more critical perspective opens up when we realize that old and quite fundamental contradictions between new technologies in “the mode of development” and in the mode of production are expressed in the

8 For a critical theoretical consideration of Beck’s claims concerning the analytic unimportance of nation-states – which are representative of globalization theory in general – see Chernilo 2006, 9–16. There, Chernilo points out that Beck’s critique of “methodological nationalism” in fact “mirrors the object of its critique”. This is so because Beck “ends up equating all previous social theory with methodological nationalism and thus has no option but to understand the nation-state from a methodologically nationalistic standpoint”. This view exaggerates the solidity of nation-states before the alleged global cosmopolitan era. Against this perspective, we need to pay attention to contradictions between nation-state formations and their alleged counterforces (globalization, cosmopolitanism, etc.), including the fact “that nations arose, symbolically as well as materially, conjoined with classes so that the harmonious view of the nation-state’s past is just a myth” and that “rather than two opposing forces that threaten to split modernity apart”, nationalism and cosmopolitanism “co-emerge and co-evolve”.

new situation. Thus we can observe, for instance, that there are aspects of new communication technologies which go against the interests of capital, such as the sharing of audio-visual files in the internet that are upsetting the extraction of profit from cultural products. However, we should be concerned not to make too much out of the emancipatory character of such media-technological gift-giving practices, since “the subordination of [the ‘new media’] sphere to the imperatives of capital, and therefore its selected voices and meanings, continue apace as technologies and companies converge, as companies diversify their interests and as capital extends its reach both in global space (penetrating the last remnants of the Second and the Third Worlds) and its intensive squeezing out of *more* surplus value from already commodified domains” (Wayne 2003, 262). Castells notes the existence of such long-standing developments, but he constructs his overall network society model without building bridges to theories that deal with them more comprehensively. He professes that his trilogy is about informationalism and capitalism, but in reality, “the dual logic of capitalism and informationalism collapses into the singular logic of the space of flows” (Bromley 1999, 14) that guides his work. Since Castells does not specify the “the capitalist character of the new society” theoretically, “it is then inevitable that any conceptualization which seeks to compare the logic of the old and the new will stress the discontinuities since the continuities imposed by the logic of capitalist institutions (and indeed any other ones) have been arbitrarily ignored” (*ibid.*).

Given the extraordinarily intrusive dynamics of neoliberalism, the neglect to discuss and to theorize the power of the capital is a serious shortcoming. This failure is not only present in Castells’s work, but also characterizes both the media-technological and cultural globalization paradigms in general. As we have noted, their representatives pay little attention, for example, to the ways in which capital increasingly determines culture and the media globally. However, it is not only for the lack of such analytical approach that I consider the predominance of technological and cultural explanations of globalization problematic. From a critical viewpoint, globalization and the role of the media in it need to be understood from a perspective that combines historical and structural analysis with political and cultural critique.

It is not that academic globalization theory is apolitical: all academic globalization theorists covered in this study express or discuss critical-emancipatory goals in their arguments. Yet we need to pay attention to their precise nature. Castells, even though wary of utopian scenarios in general, sees hope in the renewal of communal bonds with the help of new communication technologies and in the new social movements that are “superseding the exhausted social movements of industrial society” (Castells 2004a, 191). Lash provides a more radical analysis of the consequences of new information and communication technologies; but he, too, emphasizes the obsolescence of former dynamics of political struggle and former foundations of critical social theory. According to him, critical social thought today no longer operates through an engagement in rational discussion of political goals. Instead, it must submit to the self-organizing power of new information and communication technologies that alone determine the course of future civilization, for bad and for worse. For cultural globalization theorists, the rise of more cosmopolitanist identities and the increasing permeability of nation-

state borders, developments produced by new electronic media and communications in particular, are the positive contributions that “globalization” makes to human emancipation.

What all of these diverse discourses have in common, together with the outspoken reformism of such globalization theorists as Giddens, Beck and Held, is that they are reluctant to extend their emancipatory visions to address the structural injustices caused by the capitalist mode of production. The notions of cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan governance, which are embraced by many academic globalization theorists, have their merits, but they promise “to find virtue without radical redistribution of wealth and power”, a feature which, not unnaturally, makes them “attractive to elites” (Calhoun 2002, 892–893; see also Schmidt 2000, 13). What unites mainstream globalization theory is the conspicuous absence of a substantive critical account of capitalism. This has nothing to do with the assumption that the analysis of globalization should somehow be politically “neutral”, since globalization theorists take value positions “for” and “against” many things. Emancipatory visions, whether expressed with a radical postmodern sense of cultural difference or through a more traditional enlightenment standpoint, belong organically to social theorization, classic and contemporary. We are reminded of this in the following passage, which also refers to the real reasons behind the mentioned “absence”:

“Whether its analysis tends towards celebration and acceptance, or critique and rejection, social theorization depends upon the social world it theorizes. A major reason for studying the present is to understand the power that it exercises, and critiques of it are largely, if not absolutely, dependent on the hope of a possible different world. Such hope, in turn, depends on the visibility, however faint, of some alternative power or force with a potential to carry the critique forward into active change. What happened to socialism and Marxism in the 1980s and 1990s was that the alternative forces appeared to melt away. While the inequalities of capitalism were increasing in most countries, while the global gap between rich and poor was widening, and while the brutality of the rulers of the main capitalist states was reaffirmed again and again, the dialectic of capitalism was imploding. Capital’s new push was not accompanied by any strengthening of the working-class and anti-capitalist movements, nor by the opening of a systemic exit into another mode of production – at least not in perspectives visible to the naked eye. On the contrary: labour was weakened and embryonic systemic alternatives fell apart, or were completely marginalized. The global confluence of left-wing political defeats and social meltdowns in the last two decades of the 20th century was overwhelming, by any measure.” (Therborn 2007, 65)

This clarification, for all of its incisiveness, is only partly correct. It points, correctly, to a real shift in the balance of political forces at the end of the twentieth century; but its sense of “realism” in front of the political challenges of the twenty-first century is fallacious. What Therborn argues, which is by now conventional wisdom in social



theory, is that the collapse of the state socialist system has so shaken the field of social thought that a recourse to radical Marxist-socialist perspectives must now be seen as leading to a political impasse. Therefore, those who today want to carry the flag of social emancipation in academia must of necessity transform themselves into post-Marxists, postmodernists, critics of “euro-centrism”, global cosmopolitanists, etc. Such “realism” regarding the critical aspect of social theorization is the unifying political ethos of academic globalization theory as well.

Is this ethos justified? Two answers present themselves. According to a positive one, it is: the “fatal attraction” (Castells 2000a, 1) which Marxist-socialist theories had to totalitarian regimes of the past and the outdated concept of proletarian revolution on which they depend that has tarnished them beyond salvation. In other words, we can blame the left itself for the need to abandon its radical theoretical tradition. A second answer is in the negative: the rejection of radical leftist tradition by many academics is the conformist outcome of the anti-political, anti-utopian thrust of neoliberalism. For a considerable number of contemporary social theorists, a radical opposition to capitalism no longer seems feasible, neither in imagination nor in praxis. This necessitates a turn to more moderate, especially reformist, modes of critical inquiry.

The proposition that social theorists have to draw, if they have not done so already, the proper conclusions from the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc – that is, they need to give up imagining alternatives to capitalism – has serious disadvantages. First, it ignores the diversity of radical social theory tradition. The notion that socialism and Marxism have been thoroughly discredited because of the legacy of communist party rule “occludes an examination of the multiple definitions and diverse interpretations and conceptions of socialism which have existed and which currently exist”, including “political traditions that have been critical of the Soviet Union, such as, for example, the New Left and Western Marxism” (Loyal 2003, 166). Second, the fact remains, as Therborn (2007, 113) rightly observes, that “capitalism still produces, and will continue to produce, a sense of outrage”. It produces both old and new forms of exploitation, insecurity, inauthenticity, depression and anxiety (of the new, see e.g. Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 345ff). My point is that academic globalization theory of the kind that I have been discussing in this study is not attentive to such issues. Because it does not want to theorize capitalism and its current global form in any specific sense – such specificity is explicitly denied – also the “outrage” which it produces cannot be expressed and conceptualized therein, except in a weak form.

An alternative to the underdeveloped “sense of outrage” in globalization theory is offered, for instance, by Frederic Jameson. Among contemporary Marxists, Jameson has most vocally defended utopian thinking and the need to analyze the fear that it arouses in politicians and intellectuals. Against their common anti-utopianism, he insists on keeping “alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one” (Jameson 1971, 111). He argues that what makes utopian thinking unavoidable today is “the invincible universality of capitalism”, which is “tirelessly undoing all the social gains made since the inception of the socialist and the communist movements, repealing all the welfare measures, the safety net, the right to unionization, industrial and ecological regulatory laws, offering to privatize pensions and indeed to dismantle whatever stands



in the way of the free market all over the world” (Jameson 2007, xii). There are strong currents in politics and in social theory that resist such critical formulations. The popular notion that another kind of socio-economic system is not conceivable sits perfectly in line with the ongoing neoliberalization of the world. The present mood in academia is also anti-utopian vis-à-vis radical transformation of that system, even if that stance is argued intellectually rather than through a direct celebration of global capitalism as the “end of history”. The main foundation of intellectual anti-utopianism is the claim that it will always lead to totalitarianism, a proposition that is often presented by making equations between historical forms of fascism and socialist thinking in general (see e.g. Gupta 2002, 256–258).

Despite these intellectual misgivings, I think that Jameson’s critique of anti-utopianism is healthy. The present neoliberal global capitalist rule is totalizing, expanding horizontally across nations and regions and vertically across different spheres within societies. It offers an ideology of “a future colonized by a universal market order” (Jameson 2002, 13). In the face of this totalizing creed, some sort of counter-balancing utopian conceptualization is called for. This is the contribution that radical social theory can still make. However, any old utopian conceptualization will not do. The hallmark of destructive utopian impulses – whether we speak of German fascism, Stalinism or Christian and Islamic fundamentalism – is their attachment to faith and dogma rather than reasoning. What is needed in their place is the pursuit of “rational utopian thinking” which is “cognisant of the dangers of irrationality and visionary ideas and repressive demagoguery or totalitarianism” (Gupta 2002, 258). I see no ground to think that such rational utopian thinking, separated from utopianism in general, could not be applied against the injustices of contemporary neoliberalized global capitalism as well. There is nothing mystical about such rational utopianism. It proceeds, first, from the recognition that our current institutions are not working ideally, that they present “unwanted sources of determination” (Bhaskar 1989, 6) which pose unnecessary limitations to our human needs and potentials (Hahnel 2002, 11). Second, rational utopianism “progresses on the conviction that the identifiable causes for dissatisfaction can be removed through means which are under human control; that if certain voluntary measures (whether incremental or revolutionary in character) are adopted, identified causes for dissatisfaction can be overcome” (Gupta 2002, 259).

In light of the distrust of collective projects of radical socio-economic change, it is worthwhile to repeat that, historically, societies have designed mechanisms to combat the pernicious features of capitalism (Polanyi 1957 [1944]). As a result, societies are not capitalist through and through; they express anti-capitalist strivings in their very fabric. These strivings have been materialized in the form of labour unions, parties, welfare institutions, public and “alternative” media institutions, local democratic campaigns, participatory economic collectives and periodic mass demonstrations. In this sense, the “outrage” that capitalism produces finds its voice in the kind of utopian thinking which is bound to what already exists (rather than to a “place which is not”) and which can thus be developed further by strengthening those already existing forms. If we think of precisely those dissatisfactions which the current corporate capitalist order breeds, it is logical to think that only a critical capitalism-specific theory can address them properly,

rather than a theory which is silent on them or which concentrates its energies on other issues.

These comments may sound antiquated to many professional ears, but they are the ultimate stakes in our discussion of globalization, and by extension, academic globalization theory. As I have shown in this study, academic globalization theory has been founded on polemics against Marxist-socialist perspectives and a degree of non-polemics against neoliberalism. Such distancing does away with countering “neoliberalism’s deliberate policy of depoliticization” (Munck 2005, 68) and renders thought submissive to the suggestion that this policy is automatic, since we cannot imagine radical alternatives to that which it boosts, namely, the capitalist character of contemporary societies. The other way of saying this is that the imaginary that mainstream academic globalization theorists have conjured up does not go beyond a presupposition that makes their analyses subservient to capitalist globalization.

Even after voicing these criticisms, I do not intend to offer a fully-developed theory that would prove the futility of academic globalization theory as a whole. This has not been my aim. A degree of pluralism is healthy for social theory; different paradigms alert us to different aspects of society, economy, polity and culture, and a dialogue between them enhances the possibility that new ideas continue to be developed. My criticism of academic globalization theory has not been merely negative but also motivated by the wish to keep such a dialogue alive. Yet a dialogue between different perspectives does not necessarily prepare the way for a grand synthesis. As I have shown in this study, media-technological and cultural theorists of globalization have concentrated on such issues as mediatization, spatialization, deterritorialization, cultural mixing, the downfall of national boundaries and the coming of more cosmopolitan cultures. Through a critical engagement with these themes, I have noted that in their common media centrism, globalization theories have left out many issues that are still vital for our analysis of media, communications and globalization. The tensions that have been thus exposed preclude any easy synthesis.

Whatever new features and flows there are in the mediated globalization of today, whether we understand them as the outcome of a technological process of network-building or as a process of cultural hybridization, they have not invalidated the central fact that the media throughout the world, by and large, have not become less supportive of long-standing structures of domination. In particular, since their critique of neoliberalism is at best lukewarm, mainstream academic globalization theorists have not provided much in the way of analyzing and countering “the unprecedented globalization of capitalist imperatives” (Murdock 2004, 27) which cannot be disassociated from the formation of a more commercially-driven global media sphere. As I have noted in this Chapter and in the previous ones, this is not an issue that has troubled media-technological and cultural globalization theorists. Instead, they have endowed new media and communications with many emancipatory capabilities. However, technologically improved interactions or enlarged cultural imaginations provided by new media and communications cannot fix the social ills that are produced by the capitalist mode of production. From a critical perspective, emancipation depends not on the transformation of technological structures but, more

properly, on the transformation of political systems and structures of private power within which the former are embedded. This is the focus that academic globalization theorists systematically serve to dislocate. Heavy theoretical investment in media and communications technologies and the resulting media centrism serve to promote an abstract utopianism, substituting for more substantive utopian visions that would be able to counter the depoliticization of the global capitalist economy.

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## ERRATA

Corrections to the pdf-version of the book:

On page 103, there is a missing footnote after the following sentence:

Castells can legitimately be regarded as one of the leading sociologists of our time, comparable in popularity and influence only to such names as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman or Ulrich Beck (who, not coincidentally, are all also seminal names in the field of academic globalization theory).

FOOTNOTE: See an interesting, though limited, ranking of social scientists by number of citations in the Social Science Citation Index between 2000 and 2009, offered on the home page of Manuel Castells ([http://www.manuelcastells.info/en/SSCIsocialranking\\_eng.pdf](http://www.manuelcastells.info/en/SSCIsocialranking_eng.pdf)) (accessed June 2010).

On page 103, there is a missing footnote after the following sentence:

Such praises may be strained, but even many commentators who have been critical of the trilogy have acknowledged that it is a “brilliant achievement” (van Dijk 1999, 128), “a *tour de force*” (Webster 2002, 123).

FOOTNOTE: A notable exception to this is a scathing review article by Abell and Reyniers (2000), in which the authors find Castells guilty of sloppy conceptualization, selective use of empirical evidence and, most of all, the cultivation of “pseudo-poetic” language infested with banalities and truisms. Castells’s answer, no less scathing, to that exceptional critique was presented in the same journal (British Journal of Sociology) shortly afterwards (Castells 2001b).